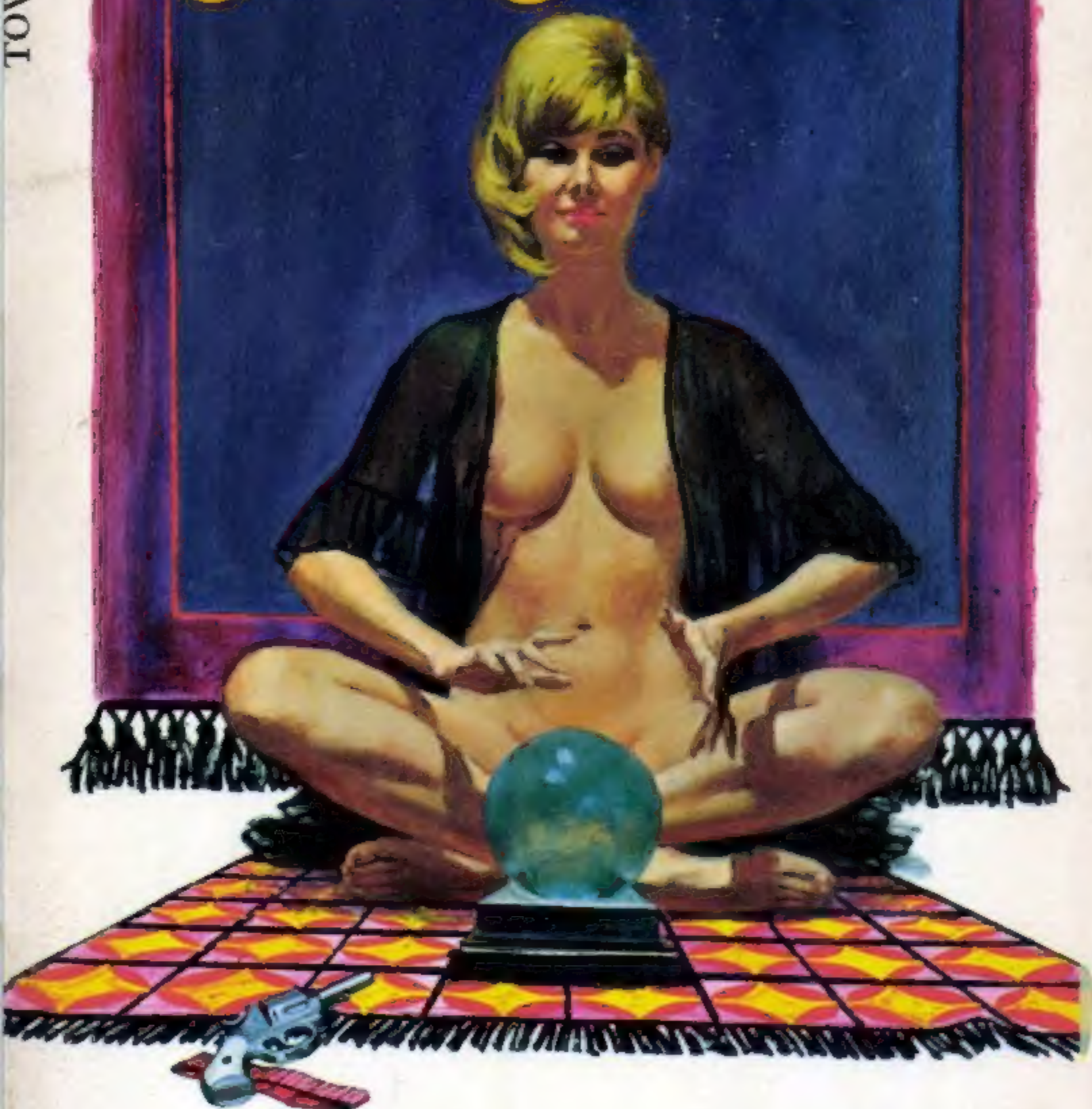


LADY FROM L.U.S.T.

BLOW MY MIND



ROD GRAY

The spirit world blows wild when the Lady from L.U.S.T. uses sex and the supernatural to fight the people with ESP.

Two Sides of a Girl Spy

My heel caught the Russian right in the groin. He was nauseous, but not yet at the upchucking stage. Then my rigid right hand whacked the back of his neck. The forefinger and second finger of my left hand joined and came up under his face, right for his eyes. He screamed, and I didn't blame him. My fingertips were all bloody.

My thighs nudged the Englishman. He drew a breath and tried to draw back. I wondered if he might be a virgin, liked him for his innocence. The young man stared at my naked torso, at the filmy black brassiere that did very little to hide my breasts. He watched as I slid a hand inside a bra cup and lifted out a perfect white globe. I thought my young Casanova would faint.

**BLOW
MY MIND**

Rod Gray

A Tower Book

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Chapter One

I stood there in my bikini mini-panties with my bare cheeks hanging out and listened to David Anderjanian rant and rave about—of all things!—a ghost spy! I paid him no mind, just kept glancing at my reflected midriff in the mirror and wondered if I was gaining weight.

"David, do you think I'm putting on pounds?"

"Eve Drum!" he bellowed. "You listen to me!"

I lost pounds right there, with that bull voice exploding in my ears. I am a girl-girl spy for the League of Underground Spies and Terrorists, often called L.U.S.T. I jumped and squeaked and got honestly scared.

David usually resorts to biting sarcasm or a wallop on the behind to highlight a point. I have rarely known him to scream. Then it dawned on poor little me. David Anderjanian was scared himself. Badly.

He is a giant of a man, six feet four, and maybe bigger because he weighs in the neighborhood of two hundred and twenty pounds. Right now he was white as a sheet and his eyeballs were kind of popping. He ran his tongue around his lips and his breathing slowed a little.

"Will you please pay attention to me?" he begged. "This is a damn serious matter, Eve. Everybody in the Pentagon and the White House is damned near out of their skulls about what's going on."

"So okay, I'm listening."

He went and stood at the window of my posh apartment on Park Avenue in New York City, right between

the blue drapes so that his golden-haired head was almost touching the matching valance. He began hammering his big right fist into the palm of his left hand. The room shook slightly at each blow, or almost.

"The opposition has a spy who can't be seen."

"Oh, David—please!"

"I mean it literally. He gets in and out of places no flesh and blood person could go. Through locked doors. No guard can see him. The only sensible explanation is, he has to be a ghost."

He was in one of his moods so I knew damn well I'd better sit down and listen like a good girl. He was using me as a sounding board, I figured, so what harm was there in behaving myself? I sat on the edge of my blue satin bed-cover and crossed my bare legs.

David muttered, "I didn't believe it either, at first. A ghost spy! My common sense reared up and told me the Russians had a man who was so clever at thievery that he only seemed to be invisible.

"Then I learned better.

"Our first hint as to the existence of this character came from Great Britain. They'd had some hush-hush plans locked up in a building where more than fifty men were on guard. Ghost-man went into the locked room and read those plans. Or at least—somebody did. Because the M-16 boys got word from a member of theirs in the Kremlin five days later, that the Russians had those secret plans!

"When we had some of those security papers to study about that new airplane—the one that uses what passes for a magnetic motor—we put a hundred men in front of the door and along the corridor where it was being kept. I was one of them. Eve, nobody could have entered without our seeing him. Nobody! But the opposition knew about the magnetic motor; one of their diplomatic members let it slip in a sneering remark he made to one of our Air Force biggies.

"I tell you, I'm lost. And scared.

"If they have a ghost helping them, we might as well—I was going to say, give up the ghost—well, we might as well quit."

With my unerring female logic I went right to the heart of the matter. "You mean I'd be out of a job?"

"Right along with me, sweetie."

Yeah, hey. What sense did it make to maintain a flesh and blood spy ring to learn enemy secrets, when all the enemy had to do was unleash a ghost against us? I tried to be properly shaken, but all I could think about was how ridiculous this was.

"There's an explanation," I said. "There must be."

"Good. I was hoping you'd say that. What is it?"

"How should I know?" I yelped. "I'm a spy, not a seer."

"You may be right about the seer," he muttered gloomily.

"How's that again?"

"A seer, an expert in extra-sensory perception."

"Not that too," I groaned. "You're really out there spearing clouds, David. Now just settle back and relax. It can't be all that bad. Somebody will think of an explanation and do something about it."

David smiled coldly. "Yeah. And it's your job."

I sat bolt upright, mentally cursing my stupidity. I should have known! Every time there's an icky job around L.U.S.T. headquarters, they think only of one name. Eve Drum. Mine.

"Now wait just one darned minute," I screeched.

"Sorry, Eve. The General himself tabbed you."

The General was the boss-man of L.U.S.T.. He has a one-track mind. You'd think I was the only agent drawing those scrumptious paychecks. However, I have learned from experience it does no good to protest, so I heaved a big sigh and batted my eyelashes.

"What do I do?"

David grinned. I could see there was a big load off his mind. "You go to dinner with me—and the Rorwicks."

"So I'll ask the silly question. Who are the Rorwicks?"

"Experts in ESP. They're very well known, actually."

"Never heard of them."

My case officer glared down his nose at me. He does it very well, it is his bag. I dimpled a smile and eased back with my arms behind me on the bed. I did a little shimmy so that my outthrust breasts played follow the leader. David melted, as he always does. Sometimes I think he has a thing for mammaries.

"Come on, Eve," he cajoled. "Be rational."

"I'm afraid to," I told him quite honestly, "because I know where my rational thinking always takes me. Right behind the eight ball."

I stood up and walked across the room. All I had on, outside the cutest pair of feathery mules you ever saw, was the bikini mini-panties. They are about as minimum as minimum can get. They resemble the Riviera bikini in this sense; there is a tiny black *cache-sexe* partly covering my golden fleece and the rest is narrow spaghetti straps that do nothing to hide my dimpled buttocks.

David growled softly, "Put some clothes on or I won't be responsible, damn it. And we have a dinner date."

My shrug went up and down my body, shaking the softer parts. I paused before a long door-mirror to assess my girlishness. I liked what I saw as I turned this way and that, and so did David. He stepped up behind me so I could have the full effect of his manhood and put his arms around me.

His big hands closed on my breasts, almost hiding them. He let my dark nipples peep between the first and second fingers of each hand, and he used them to give my jutting breast-tips a little squeeze.

"Dinner, David," I reminded him.

"Eve, we have a little time," he groaned.

"Uh-uh. Be late for the eats, and that will never do."

He gave me a shove and a brisk rub where he knew I would feel his ready randiness and then he stepped back, breathing like a horse. Just to show I wasn't angry I

turned around and threw my arms about his neck. I kissed him with open mouth and added a bump and a grind where my mons veneris was shoved against his straining flesh.

"I'll only be seconds, honey," I whispered.

It took longer, but not much, to slip my sun-kissed curves into a low-cut black evening dress with a micro-skirt that showed off my gams up above the middle of my curvey thighs. I slipped my feet into a pair of pumps.

David rolled his eyes when he saw me. "Honestly, Eve—don't you have anything more—er—restrained? You'll attract every eye in the joint."

"This is bad?"

"We're going to meet the Rorwicks! They're happily married folks. I don't want his eyeballs falling out while he's trying to explain about astral projection."

I giggled. "He'll be more interested in another kind of projection, I'll bet." Really, I just couldn't help it.

David was having none of my insipid funnies. He snatched up my autumn haze mink—we L.U.S.T. agents get to live pretty well in between cases—and threw it about my shoulders. Then he hustled me out of my apartment door, down the carpeted hall and into the elevator.

We got to The Perch on time.

The Perch is the latest thing in New York private clubs. It is swank, posh and with it! Glass doors tinted blue, a uniformed doorman, thick carpeting and soft lighting inside where the chink of glassware and table china is muted and rich-sounding to the ears. An orchestra played all kinds of music, out of sight.

In sight, and depending on what type of music is being played, nude girls dance in golden cages above our heads. Since this is a private club, to which only wealthy people can belong, the police are very lenient about what goes on behind its glass doors. Right now the orchestra was giving out with Ravel's *Bolero*, and the four unclad lovelies in the cages were doing a rhythmic hula. David stumbled twice, following me between the tables, so that I had to

tell him to watch where he was going, not where he'd like to be.

A table had been set for four in an alcove hidden by a maroon brocade hanging. David helped me into my chair, then seated himself so he could watch the nearest of the bareskin beauties without straining his neck muscles.

"What'll it be?" he asked, eyeing a joggling behind.

"Sazerac," I told him, wanting to kick his ankle.

"Two," he told the waitress, worth looking at in micro-skirt and see-through blouse. She glanced at me and smiled. I tried to smile back.

David Anderjanian and I are unofficial sweethearts. We have never discussed getting married but it has always been somewhere in the backs of our heads. It must have been far back in David's head, judging by the way he was eyeballing the dancing nude. I drew back my foot to let him have one in the ankle.

"Well, hi!" said a rich male voice.

A man in a charcoal grey suit right out of a Brooks Brothers display window leaned over to shake hands with David. His face was craggily handsome; there was a thatch of curly black hair on his shapely skull and a big smile on his full, sensuous mouth. He was almost as big as David, but leaner, without so much bulk. He turned and let his eyes touch all my points of interest.

David introduced us. Martin Rorwick told me with his big black eyes that I was something else again. I preened at his stare. Then a head was poked into view from somewhere behind him.

Marion Rorwick was a dish, herself. Long brunette hair was gathered in a bun on top of a sultry face with bold red lips and mascaraed brown eyes. Bare shoulders went all the way around and down to the upper swells of quivery breasts inside a scanty shift gown covered with sequins. She glittered every time she so much as flicked a fingernail.

She snuggled up to me on one side, her husband on the other. I made a cute little sandwich filling in between.

David beamed on all of us, and then gave his complete attention to Marion.

We chatted about nonsense and trivia over our Sazeracs.

With the soup, David got down to business. Between sips of the *potage purée de pois casses*, I listened to a dissertation on extra-sensory perception and how the Rorwicks were the finest examples of ESP expertise that L.U.S.T. was able to find. You gather from this that I was the target of his talk.

A hand patted my left thigh as Martin Rorwick leaned closer. "Don't you fret, love. Marion and I will fill you in on the details."

A red fingernail scratched my right thigh. "Indeed we shall, pet," smiled Marion. "We'll make it all as easy as falling off the log they're always talking about."

I finished the split pea soup.

"You've got to be kidding," I said. "Nobody but nobody can do what you three seem to think that Russian did. Or whoever he was. Maybe he was disguised as one of the guards."

"He'd never have had a key, and the door to the airplane plans was locked," said David. "Besides, I was there myself. Only a ghost could have gone into that room."

"Or an etheric body," murmured Marion.

"How's that again?" I chirped.

Marion smiled at me. Her eyes were bright, highlighted by the blueing of her eyelids. Silver dust was sprinkled on her long lashes so that I swam in a barrage of glamor for a moment while her stare lingered on me.

"Everyone has an etheric body," she told me. "Quite recently the medical fraternity has discovered it. You may have noticed write-ups in the paper about a *body halo* that can give doctors information about the well-being of the merely flesh and blood body. Their *body halo* is nothing less than the etheric body of a person which we in ESP have known about for ages."

I nodded to make believe I understood.

Her husband put his hand over mine, giving me a gentle squeeze. "You can call it a soul, or a *ka* as the Egyptians did, but it amounts to the same thing. This spirit form of your identity, the thing that exists after death as sheer energy, is linked to your flesh and blood body by a thin cord of luminous matter.

"Now it is possible, while you're still alive, to remove this etheric body from your flesh and blood body, to set it free so it can travel like a thought here and there around the world.

"Many books have been written about such astral traveling. Oliver Fox wrote the best known one, although Sylvan Muldoon and a man named Tyrrell also wrote on the subject. The term *out of the body experiences* is also used, instead of *astral projection*. I admit that very few of us come face to face with such a thing during our lifetimes, but that's no reason to deny it exists.

"The Russians are smarter than we are where such things are concerned. They have a regular school for ESP research under the guidance of a Professor Vasiliev. Read Pratt's book, *Parapsychology* if you don't believe it."

I believed it, remembering other instances where I had come in contact with these Muscovites. I folded my hands and felt numb. I was going to do some astral traveling, my good common sense told me.

"You mean there really is such a thing," I marveled.

"Learn the secret of it," Marion murmured, "and you can go anywhere you will on this Earth, almost instantly."

"Oh, come on now!" I burst out.

Martin breathed, "we'll show you the way to do it this very night, if you care to try."

"Yeah!" snapped my pal, David.

I opened my mouth to protest, but it was Marion who did the talking. "There really isn't anything to it, darling. You merely concentrate a little in the proper atmosphere, and—poof—away you go."

Martin cleared his throat. "It isn't all that simple," he

murmured, "But on the whole I'd say Marion gave you the right information."

In something of a daze, I watched a hand take away my empty soup plate and replace it with a platter containing my duckling. I told myself these three were dipping their daisies in pot or worse. They had to be goofed-off. In this day and age, nobody believed in living ghosts.

I ate, arguing with myself. All right, assume the Russians had come up with a way to contact the dead. Some super perfect medium who could talk to ghouls and goblins. They had found one Russian ghost willing to come back from the Elysian Fields to do spy work for the Kremlin. The ghost-spy was alive and well in Uncle Sam land, stealing all our military secrets.

Okay. Given all that—

There was no way for me to go tramping bodiless after him. I liked my body. I wasn't about to go off and leave it; not even for L.U.S.T. and David Anderjanian. Assuming that Martin and Marion had told the truth about this astral projection bit.

I finished most of my duckling.

I said, "I don't believe a word of it. You're putting me on, the lot of you, but I can't figure out just why."

Marion murmured, "Darling, we're not!"

David growled, "If you think this is just a lot of foolishness, you don't know me very well."

I sighed. He was right about that, it was the one thing that worried me. David Anderjanian was no prankster. He took a dim view of life, even at best. It was not in his make-up to be party to a practical joke, no matter how elaborate.

"Let me explain," said Martin Rorwick quietly.

"Astral projection is not a new concept, by any means," he went on. "There are records of such flights of etheric bodies as far back as the thirteenth century. I'm talking about authenticated cases. Why, Saint Anthony of Padua, in 1226, appeared at the same time before his congregation and in a monastery at the other end of the

city. Hundreds of men and women saw him in both places.

"In 1779, a man named Liguori was in prison at Arezzo—yet attended the death of Pope Clement. He was seen in prison and at the deathbed, at the same time.

"There are many other instances. I won't bore you with them, but I could talk for hours about them. Let me tell you about the experiments of a Doctor MacDougall in Massachusetts, who weighed his dying patients as an experiment. In every instance, at the moment of death, the body lost a little more than two ounces. This is the general weight of the etheric body, or the soul."

"You said it, I didn't," I muttered.

He smiled faintly. "An unbeliever. Good. It will be all the more enjoyable to prove that what I say is true."

I glanced at David who looked very grim. It was his look that did more than anything to make me shiver in my shoes. These Rorwicks meant every word they said. They had a way to free their personalities from the prisons of their bodies and send them roaming all around the world. Or so they claimed.

I swallowed hard, not quite ready to surrender.

"All right, tell me more," I urged.

"Pictures have been taken of these etheric bodies, that are also known as etheric doubles," Marion said. "It is true there have been many frauds. Bisulfate of quinine, which cannot be seen by the naked eye, shows up on photographic film. It was one of the favorite ways to commit hoaxes on the gullible, some years back. Here, I want to show you something."

Her hand dipped into her sequined handbag and brought out a photograph. Two nude people lay on their backs on a black velvet cloth. They were Martin and Marion Rorwick. I goggled a little at the perfection of their bodies, but my gaze was also caught and held by two golden statues of them, stark naked, standing to the left and framed against black velvet.

"Those statues are masterpieces," I gasped.

Marion smiled faintly. "Those aren't statues. They're our etheric doubles, our spirit selves. We used a Graflex camera with a timing device on it, to snap it." Her hand reached out for the photograph which she put away in her purse because the waitress was approaching. "I don't show that to everyone, my dear. And there's no reason for me to try and bamboozle you, because in a little while Marty and I are going to take your spirit out of your body—with your cooperation; naturally, we couldn't do it without that—and roam about the city with you."

I gulped. "I'll cooperate, of course. And if you can do it, I'll—I'll—"

"Careful, Eve," warned David.

"I'll do whatever David wants me to!" I yelled.

"I was hoping for something like that," my case officer grinned. "I want you to see if you can get that etheric body outside your flesh and blood body. If you can—and mind you, I said, if—why, drop down to Washington and have a look about the Pentagon. We think our ghost will make another try for that plane design he's so anxious to lay eyes on."

I glanced at Martin, who nodded. "Oh, yes. You'll be able to get to Washington in a matter of seconds, or as fast as you will yourself to travel. Doors and walls will be non-existent to you. But we'll explain more about that, later."

The waitress was putting a *crème caramel* before me, as dessert. I caught hold of my spoon and attacked it, figuring I would need a lot of energy to get out of the bind David Anderjanian had wedged me into. Marion was nibbling daintily at a *tart aux fraises*, and giving me a big smile with her large red mouth. David and Martin had ordered *mousses aux chocolats*, which they devoured like hungry children.

Over coffee, the men smoked cigars. Marion and I lighted up cigarettes. Marion said, "It is necessary to be in the proper mood for astral projection, darling. We have

it down to a science, I believe. It resembles the deep meditation of a holy man, withdrawal from the flesh."

"You mean I've got to go spiritual on you?"

"It's a little like reaching down into your every pore and cranny and dragging your etheric body out by its roots. Naturally, Marty and I will be there helping you, so it won't be too hard."

"Like taking a trip," I muttered dazedly, "without pot."

Her white teeth gleamed like pearls as her lips parted in a smile. "Imagine it that way, if it helps. But we don't use drugs." Her long lashes lowered as she gave David a glance. "Would you like to try it too? We would help you as well as Eve, if you like."

David reared back in alarm. "No thanks. Eve is the agent on this case. I don't want to steal her thunder."

"Too bad," murmured Marion. "We do our thing nude, you know."

"Clothes are a distraction," smiled her handsome husband.

David blinked and looked at the three of us, turning over in his mind just what he would be missing. He cleared his throat, then asked, "Couldn't I come along on the preparations without going along on the trip?"

Marion laughed softly and covered his big hand with her own. "Darling, of course! Whatever you like. Marty and I are free thinkers. Glad to have you aboard."

David preened himself. I could have walloped him.

There was no sense wasting any more time, Martin suggested, glancing into my lowcut bodice. Their astral room was ready, they had prepared it before dressing for dinner. If David and I would join them, we would go to their apartment.

We joined them, my arm through Martin Rorwick's, his wife's fingers resting on David's muscular forearm. We decided to take David's car, since the Rorwicks had come downtown by taxi.

I sat in the back with Martin.

He amused us with experiences he'd had in his spirit travelings. "The first time I was introduced to astral journeying was when I was barely past seventeen. My mother was very strong on the bit, like my grandparents. They had been followers of Madame Blavatsky, the founder of Theosophy. She had been taught to project her spirit-self by going into a trance like state, and she taught the method to her only child.

"I'm afraid I was something of a callow cad back in those early years," Martin admitted with a grimace. "All I could think about was a teacher of mine, a redheaded divorcee. I was in her English class, and wasn't sure that I was going to make a passing grade.

"So when mother suggested I learn projecting, I was all for it. I intended to visit my teacher—who shall be nameless—and try and surprise her in some wicked proceeding, which I would then hold over her head as a kind of club to get my grade. Naturally, since every projectionist has to strip, mother felt that I'd do better with a male teacher than with herself, so she talked one of her friends into assisting me."

Martin sighed, "It took me over an hour to project, and that was after three prior attempts." He patted my hand when he saw my look of alarm. "Don't be disappointed if you don't make it right away, my dear. Not everybody can."

David Anderjanian muttered something under his breath.

Martin Rorwick heard him, because he chuckled. "This isn't unlike learning to fly a plane, you know. You just don't solo until you've been up a few times. But Miss Drum may have all the necessary attributes to make it, right off the bat. We'll see, we'll see."

"What about that redhead?" asked David.

"Oh, yes. Well, when I finally did project, I went sailing up out of our house and flew around to sort of get my bearings. Then I headed for my teacher's apartment. It was on the far side of town. I'd never been there before,

but after a few hits and misses, I waltzed into her bedroom. She was getting into a nightgown. My eyes bugged out at the sight of her in that transparent red thing—I was only seventeen, a virgin at the time—but despite all that, I kept my mind on my job. I was out to get some sort of hold over her, remember.

“Unfortunately for my plans,” Martin sighed, “she got into bed, read a few papers propped up on a couple of pillows, then put out the light and went to sleep. For the next few nights, I projected to her apartment again and again. I never caught her in anything shady, though I must admit I enjoyed watching her undress and slip into those nighties. She had quite a collection. They were all wasted, all of them.”

Marion giggled, “Tell the epilogue now.”

Martin said, “Ah, yes. I managed to pass her course without blackmail, after all. But in our yearbook, I wrote: *To the teacher with the prettiest nightgowns in the whole world.* She flushed and stammered when she saw it. She demanded how I knew about her nighties, but I was very secretive. To this day, I think that line I wrote is the greatest mystery of her life.”

David was braking the car, turning into the curb before a large apartment house in the upper Sixties.

I asked, “Could you have touched her if you’d wanted to?”

“No, no. Anything as tangible as human flesh and blood is off limits to the etheric body. However, two etheric bodies can touch, since they’re operating on the same plane—or wavelength.”

I thought about that. I asked, “Do you mean to tell me that if I found another—er—etheric body cavorting around I could injure it by an attack?”

“You certainly could. So be careful. What goes for you, goes for the other astral image as well. He or she can hurt you.”

David always gave me the good ones.

I slid across the back seat as Martin got out, giving him

a good view of my thighs.

He pulled back even more. The dear boy looked, all right, and I saw his tonguetip run around his lips. I smiled up at him and gave him my hand to yank me out.

Marion went ahead with David while Martin and I brought up the rear. I urged him to tell me about the necessary preparations for my astral journeying.

"The main thing is quiet and meditation," he explained. "You'll see, when we get you into our projection room. Disassociate yourself from everything but your inner self. Think into your body. There'll be music to help, and blue light, not to mention Marion and me."

We rode up in the elevator to a really mod apartment.

The foyer of the Rorwick place was done in shrimp-pink and black. There was an ebony environmental structure set against a red brick wall with a cushioned wooden bench, also in black, and a little fountain that purled water into a shrimp-pink bowl. The effect was delightful.

The living room was something else again, tastefully done in red brick, with dark-wood paneled walls and a tiled ceiling, from which hung futuristic electrical fixtures. Highly polished cherrywood tables stood here and there, and a gigantic couch took up all of one wall. Oil paintings of varying sizes hung above it. Two big oriental rugs lay on the floor, tempting one to take off one's shoes and walk bare-foot in its deep pile.

"I like it," I told Marion. "It's swift."

She hugged me and brought me past a small spinet to an arched doorway leading into a hall. It was floored with a deep blue runner, and had oil paintings on either side, colored predominantly blue. The overhead light shed a dim azure radiance.

At the far end of the hall was a black door on which was painted a golden phoenix rising from ashes. Marion smiled. "Before we go in there, let me show you our bedroom."

It was a large room with windows looking out over the street. There was a king-size bed. The headboard was

built into the wall, and formed part of a unit that included bookshelves, a stereo set, a swing-out television cabinet, and various assorted knickknacks. A vanity table, bench, chaise, and small writing desk with chair did not crowd the large room.

"Breathtaking," I murmured, meaning it.

Marion said, "We'd better get ready, hon."

She bent and started taking off her dress.

Chapter Two

Marion Rorwick was lushly built. She showed shapely legs in gun-metal stockings and a black girdle with dependent garters. She bared her midriff, and then a black brassiere overflowing with quivering breast-flesh. She paused to get the gown off her coiffured hair, being very careful of the sequins, so it seemed she might be doing a modified strip tease.

"Marty always likes me to wear stockings," she laughed apologetically, glancing down at her neatly curved gams. "He enjoys seeing me undress."

"I don't blame him," I smiled. "You're a doll."

She smiled and blew me a kiss. There was an inviting challenge in her brown eyes, and I began to wonder a little about the Rorwicks. However, since I am a hip chick and consider myself unbiased about everything, I blew the kiss back at her.

Marion turned the walked to the closet. She wore no panties, and the girdle was short. I saw the twin half-moons of her pale buttocks. I began to understand what her husband saw in this undressing routine he insisted on.

"You'd better get ready, too," she told me, glancing back at me over a shoulder indented by a black bra-strap. "We go nude into that room."

"Won't be very hard for me. I'm not wearing much."

My hands went to my skirt-hem. Up it came, leaving me in my bikini mini-panties. Marion stared, eyes wide, and her red mouth pursed as if she were mentally kissing what she was looking at. I felt a warm tide move across my body.

She laughed suddenly, ruefully. "You know, we have to put all fleshly things behind us when we go into our trance. It's too bad, but that's the way it is. Won't work if we're up tight about things."

I padded to the closet, behind twitching.

"Wow," said Martin Rorwick, entering the room.

"Hey," I yelped. "I thought we were playing monks."

"We are," grinned Martun, starting to undress himself. "Got to repress those sex urges, you know. But you have to have a sex urge to repress, to begin with, now don't you?"

As his pants came down his wife murmured, "And do you ever have a sex urge! Turn around, Marty."

He winked at me but he obeyed his wife. Marion crowded closer to me, half turning her back. "Undo me, pet." I undid her bra snaps, watched her bend forward and slip the cups off her heavy breasts. Then she slid the straps down.

Her breasts were big, very full. They hung as if set on springs because the slightest move she made, they bounced around slowly, nodding up and down and swaying from side to side. Her nipples were large, a dark brown. She smiled when she saw me eying them.

"They're too big, really, but he likes them."

"I'll bet," I smiled and gave my shoulders a little shimmy as if to call attention to my own bra busters. Marion nodded, staring down at them with her tonguetip sliding around her mouth.

"Yours are just right," she murmured. "Not quite as

big as mine, but large enough to satisfy even the most meticulous mammaeist."

I got the feeling that Marion Rorwick had spoken those words to other women in roughly this same set of circumstances. Well, maybe her husband was right. If you were supposed to repress all sex urges, you had to have a sex urge to repress. Right? I put a hand on her girdle zipper and raised my eyebrows.

"Yes, please," she whispered.

I ran the zipper down and her pale white hips came out into the open. There were red marks on her flesh; I let my fingertips run across them in a gentle rubbing motion as if to erase them. Marion smiled lazily and preened herself slightly. Then she bent and unfastened her garters.

Martin said softly, "I think we'd all better put on robes so as not to shock David."

He turned from his own closet where he had been slipping his arms into a plaid robe, but not so quickly that I didn't see what a big urge he was forced to suppress. I believe I smiled at him.

We put on wrappers and then went out to see David. From the butcher-block bar in one end of the room, Martin brought a double martini on the rocks and handed it to my case officer.

"We aren't allowed drinks. So help yourself," Martin told him.

David grinned weakly. Then Martin had me and his wife by the arms, walking between us down the blue hall toward the black door with the golden phoenix on it.

"There isn't much to tell you," he said. "Just do what we do. And relax. Turn your thoughts inward. Forget the world around you. Forget absolutely everything but your inmost self. Marion and I will be there to help when the time comes."

"Meditate," said Marion as her husband opened the door.

We stepped into a small room with walls and ceiling done in black velvet. The floor was wall to wall thick

black rug. Marion touched a switch on the wall and a faint blue light sprang to life. Martin shut the door.

It was weird, inside this room. The blackness gave one the impression that one was already deep inside oneself. There was nothing here to distract you, except the bodies of your companions. They slid off their robes, draped them on the black carpeting and sat on them. I played follow the leader. We sat in yoga poses, our legs crossed, and our feet pressing up against our thighs.

I closed my eyes.

Soft music throbbed from hidden speakers.

It was a little like floating in dark mists. Except for the rug under my bare fanny, there was no sensation in my body at all. My closed eyes shut out the Rorwicks. I sat there with my head bent and my hands clasped, and I tried to get inside myself. I imagined my heart, my liver, my spleen. I gave imaginary tugs at my toes and fingers, as if my etheric body were some sort of entity that had become stuck in my flesh and blood self.

Martin began to speak in a soft, droning voice.

"Sometimes you can induce a trance by a form of self-hypnosis. The trance state is the forerunner of the projection of the etheric body out of the physical body. This first astral projection will seem a little like dreaming, so that you will think you are asleep, and that your subconscious is at work." He paused.

"But as this trance state passes and your etheric consciousness takes over, you will see around you just as if it were your physical body awake and moving about. Relax, now. Keep your eyes closed. Go down inside yourself." Martin hesitated.

"You will notice too, as your vital self is freed from your flesh and blood, that your astral body is connected to your other body by a thin silvery cord. If this cord is broken, you will die. However, it will stretch almost ad infinitum, never really holding you back or delaying you in any activity which you will want to perform in your astral body.

"You will experience what Oliver Fox calls the *false awakening*. In this, you will think you are awake and that your attempt has failed. But it has not. It is the prelude to the astral consciousness—as if your etheric body is waking up from sleep. Don't be alarmed by it. Remember that Marion and I are here.

"Relax now, go down inside yourself even more. . . ."

His words trailed off and I drifted backwards and down into myself. I know no other way of describing this first experience. I was in darkness, the mood music was faintly whispering in my ears. Then the music faded out and I was in a blackness that was the comatose state that one experiences between sleeping and waking. I lay there, floating, floating.

Hands touched me, moved me until I was flat on my back.

I was almost asleep, drifting along in that comatose state where reality fuses into spirit. I was neither alive nor dead, waking nor sleeping. The mood was induced by the blue light, by the meditative music, by that voice droning in my ears, almost hypnotic in its effect.

Whatever was the cause, I was ripe for plucking.

Something caught my right hand, tugged. Another something joined itself to my left and gave a gentle yank. I was too far gone to wake, so I let my arms be pulled, slowly and inexorably, forward.

A voice sighed, "Come, Eve. Come to us."

There seemed to be a faint pain in my chest.

The tugs on my arms grew stronger. Something inside me was being pulled upward, upward. I was shedding a coat of some kind, my mind told me. I was emerging into vital life without the anchor of the weight I normally carried around with me.

Oh my God! I was dead!

The whole damn affair had backfired. A couple of angels had hold of me and were taking me to Heaven. Or would it be Hell? I opened my mouth.

Somebody was making a wailing sound.

Mr.

"Hush. Eve. Hush . . . you're safe with us."

I wasn't dead then. Or else Marion was dead too. Very cautiously I opened one eye. Marion was there, so was Martin. I stared at them without comprehension for a moment, which shows how deep inside my body I'd managed to get. I stared down at myself.

I was naked, and tinted a delicate gold. My astral body was much the same as it is in real life, with jutting thirty-eight inch knockers, a lean twenty-three inch middle, and hips, thighs and the rest to match. My golden pubic puff faded almost to invisibility against those golden skin tones of my body, which resembled a honey tan.

It was like waking up from a dream, this moment of reality. It took a little while to orient myself. I still was not quite sure what had happened. Deep down, I guess I just didn't believe in this astral projection business.

I stopped wailing and drew a deep breath.

I glanced to my left. A golden Marion stood there, slimmer and even more lovely than she had been in the flesh. Her features were smooth with timelessness and youth. Her breasts were not so heavy nor her hips so wide. There was laughter and merriment in her eyes, and the vital energy that all human beings dream about yet never quite achieve.

"Your etheric body, darling," she whispered, her hand gesturing down the length of my nakedness as if to direct my attention to it.

"You mean it actually worked?" I gasped.

"Oh, thou of little faith," murmured Martin.

Marion put her golden arm about me and hugged, her breasts pressing into my flesh. I was startled at their firmness, and the stiffness of her big nipples. Up until now, I quite frankly was a disbeliever. But the touch of that smooth flesh and the sudden interest Martin Rorwick was taking in my nudity, was convincing me that this, indeed, was a new sort of reality.

He bent his head and pressed his lips to my shoulder

"Mmmmm," he murmured, "you taste absolutely delicious, Eve."

"Hey! You mean you can have sex like this?"

His hand lifted to brush across my right breast. The nipple jumped to life, thrusting out as boldly as his manhood. I shivered.

"Only with other astral people," Marion rippled soft laughter. "Your hand would go through flesh and blood, if you were doing that to a real man."

She glanced downward. Quite inadvertently, like a reflex action, I was running fingertips down the length of Martin. I felt him, and was aware that his was solid substance beneath my fingers.

"What about these walls and the floor?"

"The floor will support you when you move along it because your mind commands it to do so. Yet you can sink down through it or into it, without any harmful effects. For instance, you can pass through the door by willing yourself to do so. It's a little like mind over matter. That's the best way I can explain it."

I hardly heard her, what with running my eyeballs over this new Martin. He was a glorified living statue of himself. No matter how we mistreat our flesh bodies, the etheric double remains quite unaffected. Martin was the embodiment of everything virile and masculine. His muscles bulged, his waist was lean and solid, his manhood was something not quite to be believed in its rampant state.

"You two have discovered a completely new dimension to sex," I breathed, quite overcome by the idea. "When your real body gets tired you can always switch over to this one."

"This is the real body," Martin told me. "That one on the floor is only the temporary sheathing for the true self. And sex isn't the be-all and end-all of this etheric existence. It only enhances your existence on this level."

"If you say so," I nodded.

I was discovering that my astral body was very buoyant. It was floating about an inch off the floor, as if

wind currents were swinging it like a ship at anchor in a strong current. I tried to lower myself and my soles were buried in the flooring up to my ankles.

Marion giggled. "Your thoughts direct your progress in this condition." She put a hand on my wrist. Her psychic flesh felt warm and alive. "Before you go hooting off to wherever it is you want to go, I must caution you. Your spirit can be killed—by another psychic body. Well, maybe not killed—nothing can ever do that. But the death your psychic body endures is reflected in your flesh body."

"What my wife is trying to say is," commented Martin, "that your real body can be killed by what happens to its etheric double at the hands of another psychic body."

I gulped. "You mean if my etheric body gets bonked on the head with a club, my real body will have a bump?"

"Right as rain in springtime."

"I'll be careful," I vowed, meaning it.

"Washington is to the south and west," Martin grinned.

He put out his hand. Marion joined her fingers with it and they rose slowly upward through the black ceiling until they were out of sight. I sighed and ran my palms down my sides. I could feel my smooth skin. It tingled a little under my touch.

"Well, I might as well get going," I thought.

I rose upward through the ceiling and into the next apartment where a man sat sound asleep in an easy chair before a television set. In the apartment above his, a little girl was asleep in her nursery bed. On the top floor a woman was using a sewing machine.

Too bad I wasn't a voyeur. I could have had a ball. I was up above the rooftop and rising fast, noticing that my astral vision was about a hundred and sixty degrees. I could see all around and even behind me. I did a slow loop to test out my thought controls.

Now understand me. I still wasn't sure about this etheric body bit and all the rest. Sure, I knew there was such a thing as astral projection, just as I knew Doctor Rhine

of Duke University had proved there was mental telepathy. I am too much the realist to dabble in extra-sensory perception, except by order of my case officer.

But here I was, four hundred feet up in the air, doing slow rolls and dives, testing out my thought controls, so to speak, and finding that they worked perfectly. It was enough to grab a girl where she lived.

I could never have managed this by myself. I admit that. The Rorwicks had not been able to touch my material body; but when they, through long practice, had achieved their astral state, they had been able to reach down inside my body and grab that etheric double of mine. Then they had simply yanked me out into the open.

I hadn't been fighting them. I was ready to come, maybe even halfway there myself, because I had been in a deep somnambulistic state. They could never have done it so easily without my help.

The city lay below me, wide and vast and throbbing. I could hear its noises very clearly, the honk of a taxicab horn, the faint blare of soul music, the rumble of a subway train. I dove downward gingerly, secure in the knowledge that I could not be seen.

An old man was standing by the curb muttering to himself. A young couple walked arm in arm along a sidewalk lighted by a red neon light. Traffic pulsed along the grey streets. I sighed. Ordinarily, I would have been part of this city life. But now I was something different. Like an alien.

I sighed and headed south toward Washington.

It was like riding in a silent airplane. I saw the lights of the houses below me, the glittering stars overhead. But I felt no cold, no wind. I was a disembodied spirit in every sense of the word.

Skeptics and cynics might not believe me, but astral projection is a matter of record. It actually does work, and incontrovertible cases have come down from the past—from the present—that allow of no contradiction. Sure, I'm a realist. I didn't believe what I was doing up there.

Yet I was either dreaming, or it was actually happening. I sped southward toward Washington.

It is hard to argue against the experiences I was undergoing. I felt the height at which I was moving; I saw the lights of the houses below; I heard the hum of traffic along the Jersey Turnpike. These were astral experiences known to my etheric body and its senses. I was really and truly undergoing them.

So there! Astral projection does work, I told myself.

And then, almost in an eyewink, I was circling above Washington, searching out the Pentagon, and then dipping downward toward that five-sided building that covers thirty-four acres alongside the Potomac River. It has five stories as well as five sides, and there are over seventeen miles of corridors inside. How the hell was I supposed to locate a ghost spy in that pile of stone?

I didn't know at the time that astral bodies have a kind of affinity for each other. What I mean is, they carry a kind of detection device inside their etheric selves. I learned that when something inside me came to attention as I swooped through the Air Force Missile Office on the fourth floor.

It was a kind of mental hum.

I slowed and sank to the floor, standing there as if listening while that spiritual radar screen of mine zeroed in on a brother spy.

He was below me, and a few miles along one of the corridors. I sank downward through the floor into a hallway filled with handsome young Marines in dress uniform, armed with rifles and revolvers. They did not see me, which was a good thing; my golden body bared to their eyes would have distracted them from their duty. I padded barefoot to the door behind which I was getting emanations, and walked right through it. It is a scary feeling to ignore doorknobs. It makes one feel like some kind of goddess.

There was a golden man crouched down at the wall vault, about to push inside the damn thing. I knew it was

no ghost I was about to tangle with; this guy had done the same thing I had, liberated his etheric double from the prison of his flesh and blood body. I grabbed his bare feet and yanked.

He came out of that vault door as if I'd given him a hot-foot. He whirled and his eyes got very big and wide. He was not a bad looker. He was about six feet tall and on the lean side, with some muscles here and there, and a face that was Slavic, reasonably handsome.

"Who are you?" he yelped.

I answered him by driving forward, right hand held stiff with the fingers slightly curved so that they formed a cone. I brought that coned hand upward below the side of his underjaw. If I'd hit him with that he would have been out for hours, if not forever. But the bastard ducked and I missed my target, landing instead on his ear.

My blow almost tore it loose.

He went backward into the vault. I grabbed his bare left foot and put my hand on his big toe. I bent it savagely.

His scream of pain sent cold chills down my spine.

I bent and took his little toe between my teeth. I bit as hard as I could. His scream hit about a hundred and thirty decibels, beyond which sound causes pain. I thought the room would fill with curious Marines, their fingers on their triggers, but apparently nobody outside heard a thing.

He came out of the vault with his right fist aimed at my face. I whirled, caught his fist and took the weight of his plummeting body across my back. I heaved down on his arm and up on my back. My astral opponent went sailing up and through the air, letting out a long wail. He went through the closed door and out into the hallway, out of my sight.

I charged after him, going right through the wall itself. It was an eerie feeling. When I got out into the hall, he was beating feet at the far end of the corridor, so that I

had only a fast glimpse of his bare back and buttocks as he slid around a corner.

I went after him but it was like locating a needle in a bale of cotton. He could pass through doors and walls; or floors and ceilings, for that matter. It was a game of tri-dimensional tic-tac-toe we played, with him flitting all over the Pentagon and me on his tail.

I lost him, of course. He could be anywhere in this pile.

I gave up after about an hour, realizing that he was probably running like crazy for his home base, wherever it was. The thought put wings on my bare tootsies. Maybe I could catch a glimpse of him from up high. So up I went like a mature Tinkerbell, and we hovered over Washington staring northward.

No dice. The sky was clear of astral people.

I went home on the double.

Just as I was about to drop down into the apartment house where the Rorwicks lived, I caught sight of a golden streak out of the corner of my eyes. I whirled and went after it. Below me were the grey streets, empty of all life at this hour of the morning. I was beyond the theatre district; this was a residential apartment area below me.

I slipped through a roof and dropped downward.

I was in a converted brownstone that had been divided into one-room apartments. In the first apartment a man and a woman were sleeping bareass with a blanket pulled up over them. I slipped into the next room, where a woman was sitting in bed, reading a novel and eating chocolate candies.

I eased through the floor.

A naked man was slipping into a bathrobe. I was about to start for the next apartment when I did a double-take. This was my quarry—inside his flesh and blood body!

I gawked at him a little, because the reality was a mite disappointing. He had been a handsome male specimen in the golden altogether, but he resembled his fleshy body the way a new Caddy resembles its 1915 counterpart. The reality was paunchy, unshaven, and partly bald. His face

had lines of dissipation, his muscles were flabby and his chest sort of caved in.

His ear was bleeding where I'd whacked it. He was making grimaces of pain and holding his ear with his hand, his head bent over as though he was afraid of tearing his ear off. He shuffled toward the bathroom. I went outside and looked at the brass number screwed into his door. 3B.

Then I went home.

Martin and Marion were there before me, already inside their bodies and waiting for me to make my appearance. As I came down through the ceiling, Marion glanced up, eyebrows raised.

She said, "I think she's back. I see a faint mist."

I dropped down and slid into my body. I could hear Marion faintly as she knelt beside me, saying, "Don't move. Rest."

I rested, snuggling myself back into my flesh envelope and thinking what a hairy night this had been. If I hadn't been through the whole bit, I'd never have believed it. My open eyes stared at the ceiling, and my breath came in gentle respirations.

Yes, this was my body, safe and well. I had been through adventures that just wouldn't be believed outside the fraternity that knew about such things. The Melewi monks of Syria who live in the mountains might believe me, because they themselves can travel in the trance-like state brought on by their whirling dances. Maybe the Tibetan monks could, too; and a few very special kinds of witch doctors, all of whom are reputedly able to free the etheric bodies for astral travel.

Martin stood up and smiled down at me. His sex urges were gone, and there was a happy smile on his face. I glanced at Marion. She was smiling beatifically to some delightful memory. Her lips appeared swollen, as if with many kisses, and her breasts seemed heavier than usual. There was a blue mark on her left breast where someone had bitten her a little too enthusiastically.

"Eve," Martin said.

"We will come, Martin," said his wife sleepily.

He shrugged and moved across the black furry carpeting of the projection room. A puff of cool air came in to swirl around when he opened the door. Marion ran her stare up from my toenails along my body.

There was a fire in her eyes.

I felt my flesh responding to it. I was positive Marion Rorwick was going to make a pass at me, and my erogenous zones, quite frankly, would have reveled in the act. But she lost her nerve and contented herself with saying, "Do what I do, Eve."

She stirred her arms and legs as if she were stretching, she gave a little wriggle of her fleshy torso. Her fingers moved, and she rippled her arms.

I did what she did. It was like fitting on a glove. You had to stretch a bit, hunch over, shake yourself. After a time you felt natural again, inside your body. This was the comingback part, like a diver emerging from the deeps and taking his time to avoid the bends.

Marion stood up. I rolled over on my front and rose ass first. Marion patted my soft rump with a tender palm and giggled.

"Like it?" she asked. "Find anything?"

"Loved it. And I laid fingers on our man."

Her plucked eyebrows rose. "You actually caught him?"

"Well, not quite. But almost. David's going to be out of his mind at that. An astral agent. Oh, boy!" I grinned at the thought of David Anderjanian trying to catch an ethereal body. "Come on, Marion. I've got to get dressed and make my report."

We walked into the bedroom trailing our wrappers behind us. I guess each of us was thinking the same thing. We had seen each other in our nudity, as had her husband, Martin. All that was left was the physical act of union.

Marion slipped a pair of lounging pajamas on over

her nakedness. I wriggled my body back inside my micro-skirted black evening dress. I hoisted my skirt, what there was of it, and wriggled the spaghetti straps and cache-sexe of my bikini mini panties up over my hips. My feet went into my shoes and I was dressed.

David was asleep in the big easy chair when we came into the living room. Martin was over by the bar, readying three double strength scotches on the rocks. He nodded his head at David and murmured, "Let him sleep."

I sipped the drink Martin Rorwick had given me with deep gratitude. I damn well needed a pick-up right about now. I stared at Martin in pajamas and lounging robe and wondered where he and his wife had been in their astral identities. They had had sex, I knew that; but where and how was beyond me.

Or maybe these etheric people had covens, like witches. It was a very interesting thought, so I reflected on it for a little while. Then David snorted and shook his head and opened his bleary eyes.

He sat up straight, staring at me.

"Sorry I dozed off. How'd it go?"

I told him, carefully and in words of one syllable, because I wanted to listen to my story too, and see how it sounded to my ears. It was fantasy, man. I said as much when I was done.

"It couldn't have been that way. I just don't believe it."

Martin growled, "Your spy friend believes it. His ear must be hurting like hell about now." His wife nodded her head slowly, sipping at her drink.

David asked, "You followed him to his room, right? You know the address. Then we'd better go pick him up. Marty, mind if I use your phone?"

The League of Underground Spies and Terrorists never really sleeps. David got an operator and was passed through to a dispatch man. He promised he would have a dozen men at the brownstone house where the Russian spy lived. David said that he and I would join them.

We muttered our goodbyes fast. Marion lingered a lit-

tle, saying, "We want to see you again, real soon." To which her husband echoed, "Indeed we do, Eve. Sooner the better."

Then the cool night air was blowing around us, and we hurried toward David's car. David eased along Sixtieth Street, turning uptown at Fifth Avenue. We went up into the Eighties.

Four L.U.S.T. cars were double parked, with men waiting on the sidewalk. David applied the brakes. I slid legs out and put my shoes on the sidewalk. I stood up and reached inside my handbag for my Belgian Bulldog. There were many armed men around me as we moved to the entrance of the brownstone, but one never knows when a girl might get in a shot no man could make.

David went first, his service automatic like a toy in his huge hand. He went up the stairs with four men following him. I trailed the men while the others scattered to search the cellars and knock on doors. L.U.S.T. agents are very thorough. We have to be, because many times the safety of the entire free world depends on what we do.

My case officer paused outside 3B.

He knocked and called, "Federal agents here! Open up!"

No answer. David put his hand on the doorknob and turned it. The door opened easily into a room fitted with second-hand furnishings, a threadbare carpet, and a single lamp. The lamp was on.

David looked back over his shoulder at me, and I nodded. This was the apartment, all right. I slipped between two of our boys and headed for the bathroom. My feminine intuition told me ahead of time that it was no use. My spy had gone.

There were drops of blood on the tiled floor of the bathroom, and a couple of bloody towels in the sink. More drops of blood stained the white enamel of sink and bathtub.

David said, "Jeez! You must have torn his ear loose."

"It was no love tap I gave him, that's for sure."

One of the boys came in and reported a lot of dried blood on the carpet outside, where he must have lain down before going into his etheric trance. When I'd hit him with my coned fingers, ripping his astral ear, his own ear had bled as well. I recalled that Marion Rorwick had explained this phenomenon.

David muttered, "He may have gone to a doctor."

"And he may have beat it to another hideout," suggested a fellow L.U.S.T. agent named Thorwald Jenkins. "Or to the embassy for instructions."

"If he did that, they'd probably get him out of the country on the first plane to Europe," David murmured, "They'd figure it would take us some time to go looking for the bastard."

"Why don't I search the embassy?" I asked.

They stared at me as if I'd grown another leg, but dear David knew I meant to search it in my etheric body. He shook his head slowly, saying, "You may have to, if it comes to that. For now, we'll handle things normally."

This meant I had to go downtown to L.U.S.T. Headquarters and go through a file on lips, noses, eyebrows, and the rest, so an artist could make a composite drawing of his face.

A man held up a book. "We know his name, at least. It's Aleksandr Tkachevich, if he owns this book, as seems likely."

We began a little hunt. There were five books with the name Aleksandr Tkachevich in them. The initials A.T. were on a set of handsome military brushes, and on a pair of sterling silver cufflinks.

"He got out of here in one damned big hurry," David growled. "And he went light, without stopping to take anything with him."

"We'll play it safe. Thor, you and Jim wait here, in case he comes back. I'll take Eve downtown. You others go knocking on doors. He could be in another apartment, getting his ear attended to."

David and I waited while the other agents went from

door to door, searching the converted brownstone from skylight to cellar. No sign of Astral Alex, none at all. However, one of the boys did turn up a woman who remembered being awakened by a noise from the Russian's apartment.

"It was a cry of pain, I believe," she murmured, clutching a terrycloth robe about her nightgowned body, standing in her open doorway. "At least, that was the impression I got when I woke up."

He might have howled when he first returned from Washington, with his ear half torn off. Up until then, he would have felt no pain. The agony must have been sickening when he entered his body; after the initial shock had worn off, his nerves would be rearing up and clawing the air, and his agony would have been terrific.

I remembered his anguished face when I followed him into his room. The man was in terrible pain. His unguarded outcry couldn't be stifled.

I nodded to David, confirming what the lady had said.

She was taking a deep breath. Then she went on, "I was wide awake, laying in bed and staring at the ceiling. Then there was another sound, that of running water and muffled curses."

Her story rang true. We knew that the Russian had been in the bathroom, trying to soothe his bleeding ear.

She shrugged. "Well, I thought it was strange, what with the cry and all, so I got out of bed and put my ear to the wall. I could hear him better that way." Her mouth grimaced. "He was cursing, all right. I could tell from his tone of voice, but it was in some foreign language, like—like—"

"Could it have been Russian?" I asked gently.

The woman darted her eyes at me, thinking. Then she nodded. "Russian. Yes, it could have been that, I suppose. I certainly didn't understand any of it. Well, I went on listening. It sounded as if he were dressing to go out, so I went to the hall door and opened it, just a little. I saw him come out with a handkerchief held to his left ear.

He looked shaken. I can't imagine how such an accident could have happened to him."

"Unless he had a girl in his room?"

I shook my head. "I'm sorry, no. No girl. He must have fallen out of bed."

"He's committed some kind of crime?"

"Yes, you could say that. Anyhow, we want him for questioning."

"I wish I could tell you where he went."

"You've done more than your share for your country," David oozed, pouring on the charm. "I wouldn't be surprised if you received a letter of commendation from somebody high up. You've helped us greatly."

All she'd done, really was confirm what we had already hypothesized. Aleksandr Tkachevich was hurt and in need of help. But would he go to a doctor or to the Russian embassy? Our men in the room would nab him if he'd just gone to get medical help.

David caught my arm. "Let's you and me go downtown, sweetheart. You have a job to do."

"Why is it I always get the jobs to do, and you snore yourself silly in a nice easy chair? It doesn't seem right to me."

"It's how the crumpet crumbles, love."

I dozed in the car on the way downtown. I was damn tired. It was close to five in the morning. David let me sleep for half an hour after he'd parked the car in the L.U.S.T. parking lot. Actually, I think the big lug wanted forty winks himself.

It was past dawn when we stumbled into the headquarters building and headed for an elevator. We got off at the right floor and made our way into the "Identification Division" office. A sleepy clerk roused himself from a nap and conducted us to the files where he kept the facial features for a composite picture.

David handed me a fistful of transparent plastics, depicting many kinds of eyebrows, and told me to get to

work. "Me, I'll be sleeping in one of the lounges," he grinned. "Call me when you've finished."

I muttered unladylike things under my breath.

It took me about seven hours. There were yards and yards of slides: for eyebrows, nose, mouth, chin, cheeks, ears, hairline, hair styles, foreheads, eyes, eyelashes, and distinguishing characteristics.

I put them all together. They came out as Aleksandr Tkachevich.

I checked again, then added a couple of dissipation lines for good measure. I took the slides to the clerk, who ran them through a machine that put them all together and gave us a completed photograph.

Then I went to find David Anderjanian. He was curled up on a chair in the lounge. I decided not to wake him. I was too tired to fight with him. Besides, he would insist on my studying the photograph to be sure there were no needed additions. Instead, I bent over him and very gently removed his car keys from his trouser pocket. True, he snorted and puffed a couple of times, but I am a very soft pickpocket when I want to be.

I dropped the car keys into my purse.

Then I went downstairs to the elevator. I was going home in David's car. Let him find his own transportation.

I opened the door of my apartment at twenty minutes to one. Two seconds later, something hit me across the back of my head. I stumbled forward across the carpet like a zombie on its last legs.

Chapter Three

I hit the couch and tumbled it.

My heels came up and I kicked backward like a mule, turning my head slightly to see where my target was. He had done just what I'd expected. He had come after me with his leather-covered lead blackjack raised to deliver the blow that would crush my skull.

One heel went into his midsection. Deep.

He bent over, mouth wide. I tumbled over the couch and landed on my hands. I did a handstand and then brought my legs down one after the other until I was standing, facing away from my attacker. I whirled and leaped back over the couch at him.

I guess my heel had caught him right, the first time. He was nauseous, but not yet at the upchucking stage. He tried to straighten before I could go to work on his unprotected head, but I was so mad I didn't give him a chance.

My rigid right hand whacked the back of his neck. The forefinger and second finger of my left hand joined and came up under his face, right for his eyes. He screamed, and I didn't blame him. My fingertips were all bloody.

This baby was going to give me no more trouble. He was clawing at his eyes and screaming with all his lung-power. I ran past him to the door and slammed it shut. I threw the bolt and the chain-lock and set the police lock in place, propping it up so nobody could get in unless I let them. Then I moved in on my victim. I hammered my

right fist into his belly. I turned him toward the bathroom and booted him in the can.

I was surprised he hadn't fainted.

He was inside the bathroom being sick in the toilet bowl, moaning between retchings that I had blinded him. I had taken a good look at his bleeding eyes. They would be all right, given the care of a good doctor.

"You'll get the doctor when you answer questions," I snapped. "Otherwise I'll really go to work on you."

The man was shaking in his fright. He was a hired killer, he had been sent to hide here and wait until I came home. Then he was to crush my skull with the blackjack. He told me all this between his retchings.

I walked across to my telephone table and called L.U.S.T. headquarters. "Go wake that lazy bum, Anderjanian, and tell him Eve Drum's been attacked in her apartment and needs help." I slammed the phone down. Let David worry a little.

My victim was on his knees, his cheek resting on the cold enamel of the toilet bowl. He wanted to die, he assured me. I guess he was in pretty bad pain because his body kept shaking in rhythm to his moans.

I sat down on the edge of the tub. "I'm sorry I had to do that," I told him. "Normally I'm not so vicious, but I was tired and I got carried away. That was a damn mean thing to do to me, anyhow—so you deserved what you got."

My fingertips very carefully felt the back of my head. My head of golden hair had protected me to some extent, from that first swiping blow. Actually, I think my attacker struck before he should have so that I got out from under with only a glancing blow.

He moaned and did not answer.

I said coldly, "Listen, buster—and listen good. I've got a boy friend coming back here on the double. He's a big brute, six four and weighs two-twenty. All solid muscle. He takes a dim view of characters who want to beat up on me."

I paused to let this sink into his skull. Then I leaned forward and kicked my pointed shoe at his manhood. He lurched and almost screamed. It was not a hard kick but he didn't know that until after a few seconds.

I said, "The trouble with my boy friend is, he's a duty nut. We have to do things by the book. I don't hold with that, and besides, it was my skull that almost got crushed."

Leaning forward I ran my red fingernails down his cheeks, but lightly so as not to leave my marks. "Me, now. I'm a silver-plated bitch. I wouldn't mind getting a pliers and using them on your—"

"No," he moaned, his hands covering his trouser crotch. He was in no position to fight me or even defend himself. He was just about helpless.

"Then answer my questions!"

His tongue rimmed his lips. He breathed, "I did."

"Not these, you didn't. For a starter, where is Alexander Tkachevich?"

His bleeding eyes opened in surprise. "You know about Alex?"

"Why did you think you were sent here, you idiot? Now where is he?"

"On his way to Europe," he muttered sullenly.

I nudged him with a foot. He quivered and talked fast. "He came into the embassy with his left ear half torn off. He told some kind of story about a ghost woman having attacked him and—it was you!"

I nodded.

"Oh, now I believe him. I do. The diplomatic man we serve—Alex and I are in Intelligence, you understand—told him he'd better get himself out of here before anybody came looking for him. He wasn't to bother going back to his apartment for his clothes. A car drove him to the airport.

"Then my superior sent me here.

"I guess he recognized you from Alex's description.

Maybe they've had you under surveillance. I'm not sure. Anyhow, he told me to—to kill you."

"Yeah," I murmured glumly, thinking that my apartment would be a very unsafe place to be in the next few days. The opposition would hardly stop with just one try. I stared at my attacker and told myself I needed a vacation, anyhow.

Ten minutes later David began kicking at my door. I let him and half a dozen men in, all of them with guns in their hands. I explained what had happened.

The men took my attacker away to get him some medical attention, and a little cell in the metal rooms where L.U.S.T. keeps important prisoners. L.U.S.T. does not operate the way the C.I.A. and the National Security Agency do; we are a little freer in our methods. We use fire to fight fire. And sometimes people who play with us get burned.

David said, "Poor Eve."

I stared hard at him. David Anderjanian rarely sympathizes with me. When he does, he has an oar he wants pulled. I said, "Honestly, David. I'm exhausted."

"Naturally you are," he agreed in honeyed terms.

His big hand turned me. His fingers went to my evening gown zipper and ran it down. He caught my dress hem and lifted it. The bare me came out into the open—bare, that is, except for my bikini mini-panties which didn't hide very much—and I stood while David walked to a closet and hung the gown up. He began undoing buttons on his shirt and grinning.

"Oh, no!" I yelled. "You've slept so damn much last night you're bubbling over with energy and I'm not going to help you get rid of it. I'm tired and—"

"Certainly you're tired, darling. And you're going to bed and to sleep. I'm just going to tuck you in."

His pants came down, with his shorts. A big part of him popped up into the open and I gawked, blinking my weary eyelids. I keep forgetting what a large man David really is. I put my arms out and held my hands palm-up

to him as I retreated backward across my bedroom carpeting.

"No, David. I'm not in the mood. Really, I'm not. Go find somebody else to play bang-bang with."

"Who's going to play bang-bang?" he asked with shocked indignation. "Not me! I'm just going to make sure you get a good rest."

"Oh, yeah?" I asked suspiciously. "With that club to knock me senseless, I suppose?" My forefinger pointed. He grinned and shook his head.

"No bang-bang. I promise."

He was an inch away. At least, part of him was. He bent and caught me under the knees and around my bare waist and he carried me toward my bed. He let me down very gently, but he brushed me with his rampant manhood. I understand how it was aching.

"No, David," I said firmly.

His head bent and he kissed my bare hip. "You still have this on," he smiled tenderly, and began removing the mini-panties. His fingers were gentle, they just brushed across my pubic mound and the cheeks of my girlish behind, very softly, like lips caressing me. He got it off and dropped it on the rug.

Then he bent and ran his open mouth up my inner thigh. I tried to close my legs, I really and truly did. But I was tired and my muscles were not responding as usual. Besides, his lips were warm and slightly moist, and they sent a thrill up and down my spine and other places.

"David, no," I murmured.

His hands were on my inner knees, holding them apart. My head was sunk into my foam-rubber pillow with the pink pillow-cover over it. The mattress and the crisp bedsheets were soft and cradling under me. I sank deeper into the bed and let David go on kissing up and down my inner thighs.

He was in no hurry. My eyelids closed and I lay there with a faint smile on my sensuous mouth. His mouth was

getting bolder, he was almost at my femininity. His large, thick tongue came out to lick.

I guess I moaned, because he breathed, "Sleep, darling."

I was queen of the Nile, all right. His tongue was an ecstasy sinking roots deep into me. My naked hips squirmed and wriggled. I sighed. My muscles were so soft, so half asleep, that I could not have moved no matter what my case officer did to me. But he just went on worshipping me, and whispering for me to go to sleep.

After a time, I believed him.

I whispered, "David, you really can be a darling."

So I did what the man wanted. I fell asleep.

The telephone waked me. David was under the bed-covers with me, as naked as I. He was still asleep. I reached over his bare chest and snatched at the phone. Then I had to wake him up. The call was from L.U.S.T. headquarters.

I lay back and stared at the ceiling while he took his call. My left hand wandered onto his belly and slid downward. David grunted and grabbed my wrist.

To the phone he said, "No, no . . . just stubbed my toe. Go on, Joe." He covered the phone with a hand and snapped at me, "Cut that out!"

"What?" I giggled. "And make you a eunuch?"

I shoved his hand away and turned on my left side to amuse myself with his excitement. I was only trying to pay him back for what he had done for me, yesterday afternoon. I giggled and whispered things that really got under his skin.

When he was about to blow his top, I crawled on top of him. David was still talking into the phone. I seated myself and began to post, up and down, up and down, making a flesh blanket for him. Poor David had to go on talking while all this was going on.

I kissed his chest, nibbled his tiny nipples, rubbed my hardened breasts across his chest. David moaned.

He said into the phone, "Just got a bit of a headache.

No, no. Go on talking. You say you sent agents out to the airport with those pictures of Tkachevich? And you located a clerk who'd sold him a ticket on Air France? To Marseilles?"

David gritted his teeth, suddenly. They call me "Oh Oh Sex" at L.U.S.T. Headquarters because I know a thing or two. It's been a hobby of mine, you might say. My knowledge has helped me quite a bit with enemy agents. Liquor never loosened a tongue as fast or easily as a good screw. Males, in their vaunted superiority, look on me as a dumb blonde—genitally gifted, but still a dumb blonde—and they amuse themselves by dropping hints about their own importance.

Those hints are guideposts telling me what I want to know.

Right now, I was just having a bout of squirrel fever with my boy friend. I even varied the fun by turning around and giving him a view of the jiggling Drum buttocks as they flapped to my movements.

David groaned, "By, Joe!"

His hand slammed the phone into its cradle, then both hands caught my swivelling hips and held them steady on their course. He slowed me down when I got too exuberant and his hand slapped my bare haunch to rouse me to some spirited bouncing.

"Kentucky," he breathed at last.

I nodded and fell off him. David grabbed my pillows and set them one atop the other. Then he perched my hindquarters on the mound they made. David likes this Kentucky posture. I think it's because he weighs so much; he feels he isn't really crushing a girl when he finishes up in his own personal blaze of glory.

We got kind of excited, both of us. We fell off the pillows and rolled across the bed and back and forth until we went over the edge. We landed at precisely the exactly right moment. I screamed a little and David bellowed.

Sweaty and happy, we lay there and hugged each other.

Then David had to spoil it all.

"You're going to Marseilles, darling," he said.

"You bastard," I yelled. "You were setting me up for that."

He looked surprised. "Oh, I'm going with you. This is too big a thing to tackle in our usual way. The General feels two agents will be better than one when we go up against this Tkachevich boy."

I felt a little better. I pulled free of him and padded naked into my bathroom. Over my shoulder I asked, "Are you going to try to free your etheric body too?"

"Maybe. The General has made arrangements with Marion and Martin to meet us in Europe, if they're needed. We're going to be married folks traveling together to the Riviera."

I reached into my glass-enclosed shower and turned the taps. I felt David crowding up behind me, reaching an arm in to test the water. I like it hotter than he does. He turned on more cold water.

"Don't I get any privacy at all?" I asked coolly.

His manhood bumped my behind. "You sure do, lady. All I've got." I tried being cool to him but David Andonian is an insensate brute. He just put his arms around me, lifted me up, and walked into the shower with me.

His hand caught a bar of soap and began rubbing it all over my back. He paid particular attention to my behind, I thought, but he really got it clean. Then he swung me around and began working on my breasts. He had them hard in seconds.

"Just wait'll it's my turn," I snarled.

"Good girl," he breathed, kissing my wet nose.

I grabbed for the soap and went to work on him. It wasn't long before I had him hopping up and down on his quivering toes, ready for another bed bout. This time, I intended to let him suffer. Silly me! I keep forgetting how big and strong David is.

He simply didn't wait for the bed. He lifted me up and sat me down astride his big thighs in the right position for coitus. Then he stood and I stood and we balled away

while the water ran down all over us. For long, happy minutes.

When we clung, convulsed, at our climax, David whispered, "It will be fun, pretending to be your husband, Eve."

"Yeah, a preview of the real thing."

"Well, you never know," he admitted, which astounded me. For David, this was practically a proposal.

His tender mood didn't last too long, however. Before I could carry on this interesting conversation, he whacked my backside with a big palm. "Get the towels, woman. I'm wet and chilly and about to catch my death."

"Some husband," I grumbled, doing what he said.

We called the deli for some food and chilled beverages after we were dry and relaxed. It soon came; half a dozen corned beef sandwiches on rye, dill pickles, plus a couple of side orders of French fries, and a six-pack of beer.

While we were feasting, I asked, "Shouldn't I be packing, lover? I mean, after all—the Riviera and all that."

David waved a hand. "New outfits for everybody, courtesy of the General, who feels that we must change our image. You know? So the opposition won't recognize us."

I groaned, knowing what this meant. A wig, clothes that were about as mod as last year's newspaper, clodhopper shoes, the establishment syndrome and all that. David chuckled, downing a glass of icy beer before bothering to reply.

"We're going to be an old married couple, honey," he said at last. "So that means I'll be along with you, in the same boat you are. If that's any consolation."

Misery loves company, but it wasn't all that miserable. Somebody up there in the higher echelons of L.U.S.T. must have loved me. The packages began arriving very soon and, to my delight, were crammed with clothes that, if not mod, were reasonably attractive. I nodded as I held up a mini-skirted sheath. I might not pop eyeballs in such garments, but I would draw stares.

Brand new luggage came, too. I made David help me with the packing by bringing me various items of clothing so I could fold and place them neatly in order. I mixed suits and slacks with dresses and undergarments to give us that married look in case anybody got snoopy.

We were scheduled for an evening flight, which meant we would arrive in Nice about the middle of tomorrow morning, so we ate a leisurely early dinner. I wore one of my new dresses. David looked very distinguished in a charcoal grey business suit. I started to feel married.

David had warned me about that, of course; my case officer is very thorough. "Remember not to cling to me," he muttered at the end of his briefing. "Real wives don't cling to their husbands."

"They should," I pointed out. "If we were really married, I would cling to you, David."

"Very touching. But just listen. You are not quite bored with me, but almost. Remember, the opposition will be keeping a sharp eye out for L.U.S.T. agents after what happened to their men in New York. We want a bit of practice, which is why we're dining out. I need to see how you behave."

So I yawned in his face all during the meal.

"Wife-like enough, David?" I murmured gently as we rose from the table. He grinned and winked.

The big Air France jet was waiting like a giant bird to swallow us up at Kennedy International Airport. David played husband to the hilt. He didn't take my arm or help me up the plane ladder. I got the feeling that if the airline people hadn't handled our luggage, he would have made me carry my own bags.

We settled back in our seats.

The flight itself was rather boring, so I slept. When we touched ground at Nice Airport, I was refreshed and ready to go. David, the darling, was not at his best; he finds it next to impossible to sleep in an airplane seat, preferring a bed on which to sprawl his big frame.

You know what that means. I got to drive the rented

Citrone all the way to Marseilles. It is not a long drive to Marseilles from Nice, and it is along the beautiful Riviera. But those French auto drivers! I was mad and hot and exhausted when I finally pulled up before the curb at the Royal St. Georges Hotel. My case officer had slept on the back seat all the way.

For a change, he acted like a boy friend. He carried in the bags all by himself, at the one time. The hotel bell-hops eyed him in something approaching awe.

He signed the register, Mr. and Mrs. David P. Longwood.

From Hohokus, New Jersey, yet.

Up in our room, David reverted to husband status. He got on the phone and began making calls. I got into a transparent black chiffon nightgown, one of my own that I'd smuggled into the valise, figuring it was none of L.U.S.T.'s business what I wore to bed. I paraded around in front of David. He was too busy finding out what the League of Underground Spies and Terrorists wanted of me to bother about my body.

When he set the phone down, he grinned at me. "Good news, Eve. You can go to work right away. We alerted all our agencies in France as well as in the rest of Europe—at least, where we have them—and Marseilles wins the chocolate cake.

"Aleksandr Tkachevich is alive and well and staying in Marseilles, in some sort of flea-bitten trap called *Le Boule Rouge*. You can go get him at your leisure."

He began unbuttoning his shirt, having already tossed his jacket on a chair. His eyes ignored my black chiffon nightie.

When I could close my mouth, I asked, "Are you kidding? Here we are all alone in a hotel room in France, and all you thing about is sending me out to kill a guy!"

"Honey, we're on a job. Besides, I'm tired."

"Tired? You slept all the way from Nice!"

"On the back seat of a Citroen? With you driving? Ha!"

He got me so mad I yanked off my nightgown and went naked in mules to a closet door. Later I learned that he was only making me mad so I'd go out and let him sleep in peace. But at the time I was seeing red, so I slipped into a panty-girdle, plus brassiere and nylons, a plaid skirt and a gold blouse. I yanked on a cardigan sweater and shoved my feet into walking shoes. My Belgian Bulldog I thrust into a shoulder bag.

I didn't even say goodbye. I just slammed the door.

A taxi took me toward what used to be the Old Quarter, and what is now a big housing development. The Old Quarter used to be a place of narrow alleyways, houses of sin, and gin joints boasting all varieties of crime and criminals. It is much nicer now, but there are little places, here and there in the Old Quarter, that once were French Resistance centers. The Nazi commandant of Marseilles didn't bother blowing them up when he began losing Gestapo agents to the good people of this city. I was headed there.

It was not a nice place to go, more than one taxi driver assured me, refusing to take me there. It was a hellhole. They were sure I was a streetwalker because no other girl would go into that corner of the Old Fort. I smiled at their inquisitive stares.

Finally, I got a ramshackle cab driven by a crazy old man who wanted to earn some extra francs. He sighed, opening the door, and announced through an alcoholic breath that the fare would be triple. I shrugged. L.U.S.T. was paying the tab.

The hotel where Astral Alex was staying must have been ancient. It was of stone, with tiny windows. To be quite honest about it, it looked just like a jail.

I walked with swinging haunches across the cobbled street and up to the wooden door. I walked into a small, dingy lobby with encrusted food making strange patterns on the stuccoed walls. A sleepy clerk stood behind his desk, staring at emptiness. Two old men were playing checkers in the corner of the room. A Nazi helmet still

hung on the wall beside a spiked German helmet of the 1914 war, as decoration.

My shapely gams took me to the counter. "I'd like a room," I smiled.

The clerk straightened slowly. His eyes lost their bleary look and took me in from throat to the belt of my plaid skirt. He liked the way my knockers shoved out the blouse material; he smiled crookedly.

"No luggage?" he croaked.

"I carry my worldly goods with me."

"And very nicely, too. Still, you'll have to pay in advance."

I gave him enough for a week. I let him see a big roll of the one hundred franc notes I was using to hide my pearl-handled Belgian Bulldog revolver.

The clerk escorted me upstairs, carrying the key. I tipped him one franc. He was cross the little room, opening its single window to let in some fresh air. I undid the buttons on my blouse and let the flaps hang open.

I always like to get the servants on my side, if I can, in case of trouble. He could see my bra cups stuffed to overflowing with female breast-flesh. My gorgeous globes quivered when I walked around the room. I'd dropped the cardigan into a chair on entering.

His eyes ate my jellifying flesh, bugging out.

"I'm going to sleep," I breathed, "for a little while. I don't want to be disturbed. You understand?"

He nodded like an automaton. His voice said, "There is only one gentleman on the floor, miss. Times are very hard, not at all what they used to be. I am sure he will not disturb you."

I nodded happily. More likely, I would disturb him. Downstairs when I'd signed the register, I'd seen the name Alexis Tsorechev. Quite often, when men use fake names, they often use their own initials. Alexis Tsorechev was Aleksandr Tkachevich. He was registered in room 2D.

He went out. I closed the door. I gave him time to go

downstairs before I buttoned up my blouse and hunted through my shoulder bag for the Belgian Bulldog and the special silencer a L.U.S.T. technician had made for it. I screwed the silencer into place. I did not want to make any more noise than was necessary when I put a bullet into Aleksandr Tkachevich.

As a matter of fact I waited until the noise of traffic outside the hotel window was loud enough to drown out the necessary popping sound of my silenced gun. Then I opened the door and walked down to room 2D.

My tiptoes made no sound on the worn hall carpeting. Neither did my hand as I wrapped my fingers around the doorknob of 2D. I turned the knob and tried the door. Slowly. It was not locked. It opened inward.

There was nobody on the bed, which was neatly made.

I stepped into the room and into sight of a mirror. The mirror showed the reflection of a man behind me, a man with a brutish face, the main features of which were a low forehead and a flattened nose. His eyes were small and mean, and his lips were twisted in a sneer. But the most terrifying part of him was the Russian Nagant revolver he was holding in a very steady hand.

"Don't move," he growled in Russian. "And drop the gun."

I did not move, except to drop the Bulldog. A closet door opened and Aleksandr Tkachevich came out, very white and shaken. His eyes were big and round as he looked at me. I stared back at him, wondering if I looked as scared as he did. The man behind me was cruel and hard; the killer type, if there is such a thing. And I was in front of his gun.

"That's her," Astral Alex croaked.

"Good! I knew it would be. All right, lady—turn around. Alex, go get the cord."

I swung about to look into the pig eyes and the distorted ugly face of my captor. He was grinning, showing blackened teeth. Across the shoulders and chest he was very big, and there were bulging muscles on his arms. His

legs were too short for his upper body, but not grotesquely so; he was only a little taller than me, though he should have been inches higher.

"You have little faith in us, spy girl," he growled. "We didn't know you'd be coming, but we guessed right. We gave you a lot of credit, we figured you'd find Alex here, no matter where he hid out. We picked Marseilles so I could be here to protect him. I am Pietr Lomosov."

He said it proudly, as if I should be impressed. I picked up my cue and let my eyes get big and bulgy as I opened my mouth. "You are? Not the real Pietr Lomosov? The man we've heard so much about?"

He never got the message. He grinned and nodded, pushing out his black-sweatered chest like a pouter pigeon. "Now you know what you're up against, spy girl. It is too bad you didn't know Pietr Lomosov had been called in on this case. Then you and your degenerate capitalist companion might have had the sense not to come here."

"We certainly would have had the sense not to come here," I echoed. At least, not the way we did. I would have come in shooting, buster, I told myself. My gun with its silencer was on the carpet at my feet but I didn't dare reach down for it. Pietr Lomosov looked very deadly.

By this time, Aleksandr Tkachevich had come up with the cords and began looping them about my wrists. I was puzzled, so I asked, "Why don't you just shoot me and get it over with?"

Lomosov chuckled thickly. "It would be too easy—and a waste of material." The way he said that made my hair stand up. "No, no. You have a tongue, girl spy, and you will wag that tongue the way we want you to wag it. So why should I kill you and loose the chance of learning much that we would like to learn?"

He made sense, I knew damn well what he meant; he and his buddies were going to torture me. I would be made to tell about David Anderjanian sleeping peacefully

and unsuspectingly in our hotel room, maybe even about Marion and Martin Rorwick, who had helped me, along in astral traveling.

The Russians would kill the Rorwicks for sure, so they wouldn't help anybody else go hunting for their spectral spy. I felt weak and woozy. My flesh crawled when I thought about being tortured. I do not like pain, being no masochist.

"There now," nodded Lomosov. "You are ready to travel."

"Out of the hotel? Like this?"

"You insist upon underestimating us, girl spy. No, no, not upon the street. Down into the cellar. Go ahead of me."

We marched down the hall to the far end of the floor, where there was a narrow staircase behind a wooden door. The staircase was walled in, the way they used to be years back. Nobody could see us going down those stairs. Pietr Lomosov was right behind me with his gun trained on my spine, and Aleksandr Tkachevich echoed his footfalls.

Pietr marched me up to a blank wall. His right hand touched a metal fusebox, opened it. His fingers turned one of the fuses. There was a hum of a hidden motor and part of the wall slid back.

Chapter Four

He pushed me ahead of him into the cellar of the house next door. Behind us, the hidden door shut back into place. We were in a wood-paneled room that looked like

a playroom in any suburb back home. There was a bar and a cushioned bench running all around the room. There were a couple of tables and some chairs scattered about. Hanging from the ceiling was a large bird cage.

I stood there, waiting. My forehead was wet with nervous sweat, my skin was full of goosebumps from sheer terror. Nobody had shouted threats at me, which made it worse. It was the grim, cool professionalism of Pietr Lomosov that got under my skin.

He knew what he was doing every step of the way. He went to a wall and pulled a handle beside a picture of Josef Stalin. To my surprise the bird cage lowered to the floor. When it rested on the dark carpeting, Pietr opened the barred door.

"Inside," he growled.

I stared at him. "I'll never fit in that!"

"Not comfortably, no. Get into it."

He and Astral Alex had to shove me in head first. The cage was big for a bird but small for a human being. I could neither stand nor sit, kneel nor crouch. I was shoved into that thing as if I had no bones, like a rag doll. I was uncomfortable. I hurt. My legs were doubled under me, my behind pushed against part of the cage, my face against the bottom. My arms were folded under me and the top of my head was almost touching my thighs, since my back was arched like a bending bow.

"I hurt," I whimpered.

"Of course you do," said Pietr conversationally. "Otherwise you wouldn't be there. You see, we will leave you like that for a little while to let you think about your capitalist sins. When we come for you, I think you will be ready to talk."

He was probably right, I thought. So I made like a human pretzel for many minutes. Sweat ran off my head and between my thighs and down into the valley of my crushed breasts. I ached everywhere. Maybe this does not seem like any kind of torture but it hurt unlike any other suffering I have ever endured. Solid steel bars pressed into

me, I pressed into myself. It was damn hard just to breathe.

I heard a door open and close. I could look only in one direction because of my cramped position and so I saw no one. But I did hear footsteps approaching, too heavy to be those of a girl.

A youth came into view, a young man with the face of an angel. His skin was pink and healthy, and he had a mop of brown hair falling in ringlets down about his shoulders. He smiled at me, very gently.

"I'm here to undress you, girl spy."

He took a knife out of his pocket.

"I don't like girls, you know. I like boys. You would call me a queer, I suppose, but I can't help it. No more than you can help liking men." His sigh was almost tragic. "But it is the way I am, and explains why the great Piotr Lomosov sent me to you."

He went out of my sight, giggling slightly. I was so far gone already that I felt I couldn't be any worse off. Stupid little me! His footsteps stopped.

Something cold touched my bare thigh above my nylon stocking. I tried to scream but it came out a quavery gurgle because my left arm was across my throat, practically choking me. The coldness moved up and down slowly, and I heard his wild giggling.

"I'm looking up under your skirt, you know," he whispered. "You have very pretty legs, really. Soft and shapely. Almost as pretty as mine when I dress up like a girl. I have to be very careful about this, I think. I don't have any nice girly things like you're wearing. These are real nylon stockings, aren't they?"

His hands touched my garter clasps, very carefully undoing them. His feathery fingers began unrolling my stockings down my left thigh and then my right. It was impossible for him to get the stockings off, the way my legs were doubled under me. I began to get a glimmer of hope.

"Tsk, ts, ts. How silly of me! I should have known

better. I've got to take you out of that cage to undress you properly, now don't I?"

I began to hope, wildly and crazily. Once I got outside that cage I would knock this boy out and take his knife away from him. I would stuff him inside the cage and leave him here to answer any questions the great Piotr Lomosov might dream up.

I heard the cage door opening. Then soft fingers touched my ankle. And I screamed fit to kill. My body was so cramped, my muscles had locked on me and when he tugged at my leg, my body erupted into a thousand white-hot needles pricking me everywhere.

"No! No! No! Please don't," I heard myself calling. "Please let me alone, don't try to move me. I ca-can't stand it!"

He went on pulling, very slowly, very gently, as if he understood and sympathized with every pain that was tearing me apart. But he knew damn well what he was doing, that the very slowness of the movement aggravated the pain I felt. I rather imagine he'd done it to other women who proved stubborn when they should have been happy to answer questions.

It took ten minutes, but he got one leg out. All that time I was suffering the torments of the damned. He left the rest of me crushed inside the cage while he unrolled my nylon stockings, taking his own sweet time to tug the thing off over my painted red toenails. Then he held the stocking up and stared at it.

"It will be a perfect fit, dear. Now for the other. I'll try to be as careful as I can."

The cruel bastard! I was trussed up in a steel cage and could do absolutely nothing to protect myself. He started yanking my other leg out. It took him fifteen minutes and a thousand screams of agony from me before my toes rested on the ground while the rest of me was facedown on the steel-bar floor of the bird cage. My skirted behind was sticking out of the cage door as if offering itself for a spanking.

He drew down my other stocking. He reached up under my skirt and caught my panty-girdle between his fingers and yanked that down. He admired it, out loud.

"Oh, precious, precious. It will fit me perfectly, my dear. Think of all the money I'm saving by this. We can't get anything this lovely where we live in Moscow, you know. Oh my, nothing at all like this. I'll be the belle of the ball in these things. But—back to business."

His arms went about my middle, and for the moment I thought he was planning to rape me despite his fruity talk. But his fingers went to the tab of my skirt zipper and ran it down. Then he started inching the plaid skirt downward. All this time my legs were killing me because the flow of blood, long damned up because of my cramped position, was flowing into my legs and driving me out of my head.

My arms were still doubled under me. I just couldn't move them. I was naked from the waist down now, as he slipped the skirt off my bare feet.

"You have a pretty behind," he giggled. "So soft and white." He ran his palm over it, patting it and making my derriere flesh shake and jiggle. "You're even softer than I am. Wait, I have an idea."

He did something behind me while my flesh crawled some more. Then he came around to the side, where my face pointed, and showed me his broad leather belt.

"I'm going to whip you, girl spy. I've whipped girls like you before. They offer to do anything if I'll only stop. It seems their very helplessness adds to their pain. They aren't tied up, but they're so cramped they can't move without help."

He was telling me. Then he went around behind me and paused. Next moment that leather strap came down across my fanny. It stung like needles. My body quivered and quaked to that agony of flesh.

Up and down. Splaaaat! Up and down. Splaaaat!

After a time, I fainted.

When I woke up I was outside the cage, stretched out

on my back. The youth was lifting my blouse off me, leaving me in my brassiere. I hurt all over, badly. I tried to move an arm and couldn't. He moved me around like I was a scarecrow. Then he carefully put the blouse on the pile of my clothes and stood over me, smiling down at me.

"You're very lovely. Very. It will give me great pleasure to make you suffer. I'm going to ask Pietr to let me have you when he's done with you. Ooooh, how I should like that!"

He knelt down, and I thought he was going to remove my brassiere. Instead he slipped his fingers into my bra cups and tightened them, viciously squeezing as hard as he could. I screamed until my throat ached.

Then he brought my breasts out into the open and tucked the brassiere cups under them, folding the material over so it acted as twin supports. My breasts were red, swollen, as they projected out over the bra cups.

The youth reached down and caught my nipples between his forefingers and thumbs and pinched. I screamed some more, then I fainted.

He slapped me back to wakefulness. Then he dragged me across the floor, my arms and legs flopping as if they were made of straw, and began shoving me back inside the cage. I whimpered and begged, but he giggled and went on pushing until he had me stuffed inside the bars. He showed more inventiveness than Pietr Lomosov had shown, however. He arranged me so my bare breasts were sticking out between the bars. This necessitated my head being bent back on my neck, with my legs doubled up under me. I could feel cold steel against my buttocks.

I have never felt so humiliated.

Nor felt so much agony. Now that I'd had a taste of how much it hurt to get me out of the cage, I could anticipate the way I was later to suffer. This was the worst part of being tortured. My voice, begging for mercy, followed him up the stairs.

I was out of my skull, all right. I have endured torture

before, and I knew that when it got too bad I would lose consciousness. The agony I was now suffering was steady and it would go on and on without stopping until they came to take me out. Then it would get worse, with sharp, fiery pains that would bite deep into my nerve system.

I wept softly, in utter misery.

I must have fainted several times. I have only a vague, hazy remembrance of the period when I was doubled up after the youth had left me. There was no way to imagine time, the room was lighted indirectly, giving off a clear view if you were outside. I slept and woke, slept and woke.

A door opened. I heard the sounds of several pairs of feet. I was only half conscious, I could only see the ceiling, my head bent back. But I could hear and recognize voices.

"Have you done a good job, Igor?"

"Look my dear Pietr. What do you say?"

I heard footsteps as Pietr Lomosov walked around me. He chuckled and his fingertips ran over my bare breasts where they shoved out between the cage bars.

"A lovely job. Lovely. Do you think she is conscious?"

Fingers reached behind me and caught hold of my womanhood. They tightened and tugged and I screeched. The wail of agony came up through my throat and out into the room and bounced around from wall to wall. I wanted to move. I was held inexorably by the bars of that damn cage. I could only be there and suffer.

"She is awake, Igor. My thanks," chuckled Pietr Lomosov. "Now, young lady, perhaps you will speak to me, eh? First, where are you staying in Marseilles? Hmmm? The name of your hotel, if you please!"

"Go—to—hell!" I screamed.

The hand grabbed me again. I fainted.

I was wet. My eyes opened, staring up at the ceiling. Somebody had apparently thrown a pail of cold water

over me, reviving me. Who ever it was, was now emptying water over my exposed breasts.

Pietr Lomosov said, "The electric goad, Igor. With her flesh wet, the electricity will hurt her all the more."

Something white-hot sizzled against my left nipple.

I screamed.

The electric goad touched my right nipple.

I went on screaming.

Until I fainted again.

"Will you talk?" boomed a voice in my sleep.

"Go—to—hell!"

More agony, more wetness.

"Kill me! Please, kill me!"

My voice, begging abjectly and without shame.

Silence. . . .

I heard a voice. "Leave her. She's too exhausted to know what we're doing to her. Yes, yes, Igor. You can have her later."

A hand must have pushed the cage. It began to swing back and forth. It was like being in a cradle. Or in a mother womb while the mother is walking. Back and forth. Cradling. Oh so gentle. Back and forth. . . .

My eyes opened. I heard giggling.

"Pretty girl. Be mine soon. Pretty girl." Igor. The madness was showing a little in his anticipatory delight. The boy was drooling, he was so anxious to practise his barbarities on me. I was beyond caring. I was already one big blob of agony.

He got angry and began pushing the cage faster, harder. My eyes saw the ceiling slide by, slide by, slide by. I got dizzy but I couldn't look away. Once the cage hit the far wall, just to one side of a picture of Stalin. The jar did it.

I cried out in renewed pain.

Maybe I yelled real loud, because a door opened and a voice shouted angrily, "Igor! Come away from there! I still went to ask her questions and you're liable to kill her!"

Igor snarled but he walked away. I watched the ceiling go by, until a spark of consciousness made me remember something. Something very important. What was it? The picture of Josef Stalin. Yes. The picture was very important.

Why was that picture so important?

Then it came to me. I whimpered in sudden hope. I tried to lurch my body against the cage bars. The cage must have been delicately balanced on its chains because it responded beautifully. It picked up speed. It swung in wider arcs.

Now I sought to angle that swinging to the left of that picture. I slid more swiftly. The pain seemed to lessen because I was thinking about something other than my tormented body.

Then I hit. I screeched in agony to that jar.

But the bottom of the cage had hit the handle jutting from the wall and pushed it downward. The cage dropped fast. It slammed onto the ground and I fainted.

My eyes opened. I was not in the cage any more because the cage had come apart when it had hit the floor. I lay there doubled up and I felt the waves of red agony going all through my bones and flesh. I groaned. The mere thought of what was coming was enough to make me cry.

So I cried. But I also managed to straighten out one arm. I used that arm to move the other. I rolled over onto my back. My legs came with me, in their doubled-up position. I lay there trying to whip up enough energy to straighten them out. It hurt, but I made it.

I lay there weeping softly, arms and legs straight out. I think I slept a little while, too, because when I opened my eyes the next time, I felt a lot better. The most awful pain was gone and I had some strength inside me. I rolled over and made it to my knees.

A wash of agony went over me when I got to my feet, but I stood there and gritted my teeth, telling myself that from now on, it was my turn to call the shots. I used my

eyes while the rest of my body was immobile, taking a good look at the room I was in.

My common sense told me that there must be torture instruments down here, somewhere. Like that electric goad, for instance. My eyes found them on a big table pushed back against a wall. My eyes lighted up with glee.

There were all sorts of goodies there.

Pinchers, the electric goad, a couple of whips of varying sizes and strengths. A couple of guns. A few knives for digging painful cuts in folks. Let's go back to the guns. My mouth actually watered when I saw them. They looked good enough to eat.

I staggered over to the table.

There were three revolvers, Russian Nagants. I broke them all open, saw they were fully loaded. My pearl-handled Belgian Bulldog was here, too. I found a wire and strung the Nagants together. Then I fitted my fingers around the Bulldog.

I got back into the shadows and sat on a bench. I let the life force grow inside me as the pain ebbed. Sure, sure. The anger in my head was helping me feel strong, but I was entitled.

They came, after a time. Pietr Lomosov was first, belching at sight of the broken cage on the floor. Igor was right at his heels, running down the stairs.

I raised the Bulldog just as Pietr Lomosov turned, sensing my presence. I am a damn good shot. I own the expert marksman badge with a revolver. I shot the burly Russian in his left kneecap. He stood there paralyzed a moment, so I shot him in the other kneecap.

Ask anybody about that shot, who has been the victim of one. A bullet in the kneecap, shattering it, is damn painful. It is also very crippling. Pietr Lomosov screamed and fell face down.

Igor halted, his face white and stricken. His eyes got enormous, looking at me. I held the Bulldog steady on him. Then I shot him in his left kneecap. He fell and rolled around on the floor, screeching and sobbing in his

own bit of agony. I came out of the shadows and stood over him. He was still conscious, while Pietr Lomosov had fainted.

"Is the other one upstairs? Alex?"

"N-no-no. He's g-gone. Please! Don't shoot me again!"

"You bastard! If I had the time I'd shoot you so full of holes they could sell you for a sieve! Where's he gone?"

He hesitated too long. "I d-don't know."

I smiled. I bent down and undid his belt buckle. I opened his zipper and rolled down his pants. He didn't fight me, he couldn't. His pain was paralyzing him and besides, he was afraid I'd break his arms. The reason he was afraid of that was because I told him I would if he so much as made an attempt to stop me.

I got the pail of water and sloshed his genitals with it. Then I went and got the electric goad, plugged it into a socket, and brought it back with me.

He screamed when he saw it. I guess he'd seen men worked on with that thing. He was sweating and crying and shaking all over.

"Where'd he go?"

"Spain! Madrid!"

"Why Spain?"

"To check on a report that the Spanish are letting you have another plane base."

Mmmmm, could be. Early in last year they'd been dickering about new bases in exchange for a billion dollars' worth of military equipment for Spain. It had a ring of truth to it.

"Where's he at?"

"I don't know what hotel. They don't tell me things like that!"

I gave him a touch of the electric goad for good luck. I wanted him to know what pain was. He stiffened and shrieked, his body flopped around like a gaffed fish. Then I shot him in the middle of the forehead. I turned to Pietr

Lomosov. I rolled him over and tossed water in his face. I waited there while he recovered consciousness.

I put the gun barrel to his cheek. "What name is Alexander Tkachevich using in Madrid?" I asked.

His eyes got big. This was proof enough for me that Igor had not lied. He shook his head back and forth. Then he lunged for my gun. I pulled the trigger. His head blew up over half the floor.

I was too exhausted to be sick.

I made my way up the stairs and through the house. I found my clothes in what I assumed was Igor's room. I put them all on, slowly and carefully, figuring the exercise would be good for me.

I slipped my shoulder bag over a shoulder. Then I went out the front door, and walked into late afternoon sunshine. I strolled along the sidewalk until I came to the Old Fort. I hailed a taxi.

David Anderjanian was in the lobby when I strolled into it. His face looked haggard, there were big purple circles under his eyes. He took one look at me and damned near fainted. He had just made a request for the harbor patrol to begin dragging for pieces of my body.

He looked shocked when he saw my face. He wrapped his big arms around me and practically carried me into the elevator. It wasn't until we were in our room that I broke down and bawled like a baby, clinging to him. He was cursing steadily in a monotone, all the time I was wailing. I guess the big lug didn't have to see my body to know what I'd been through. It all showed in my face.

I told him about it, lying on the bed with him gently undoing my clothes and getting me a pair of my pajamas in flaming red silk. I wished I had been feeling better because I'd spent close to two hundred dollars on that garment.

It should have done things to his male libido, but I guess we were both too pooped to pop. David got down to his shorts, slid under the covers and took my head on his shoulder.

"Sleep, honey—just sleep. I'm here to take care of you."

I was drifting off to sleep when I remembered. Sleepily, I murmured, "Astral Alex had gone off to Madrid."

Idiot that I am!

Sure, I should have known better David stiffened all over and jerked his head back. "What?" he yowled. "I was assuming you'd killed him!"

My arms went around his shoulders. "Don't move, David dear. Please. I'm so tired. I just want to lie here and—"

"Out!" he roared.

Back went the covers. Up and off the bed flew David. His big right hand landed on my left buttock. "Up, wench! We've got to stop that ghost spy before he does any more damage."

"I won't do it," I wailed.

His hand yanked me onto my feet. His big hand would have torn those red silk pajamas off me too, if I hadn't broken free.

"All right, already," I yelled.

"Get dressed. I've got to call the General."

He turned to the telephone. I stumbled into the clothes closet and began taking off the pajamas. I heard him talking, saying something about how I'd been captured and tortured, that Astral Alex had gotten away from me, but we were on our way to Madrid after him.

Then he put in a request for the Rorwicks.

"I know they're private citizens but Eve can't get out of her body without their help and we'll never find that guy unless she does. Offer them anything, chief—but give them airplane tickets to Madrid. Barajas Airport."

I stumbled to the bed, carrying my panties and stockings and a garterbelt. I sat down on the edge of the bed. I lay back. I fell asleep.

David shook me awake. His face showed concern, it really did. But not for me. "Eve, wake up. Good girl! We've got to be on the nine o'clock plane out of Nice. It's

a little past six now. I've rented a fast car, I'll drive. You can sleep in the back seat."

"David, you know what I've been through," I mumbled.

"Yeah, yeah, you told me. Great work, honey. But now get dressed because we've got to get to Madrid to meet the Rorwicks."

At least with them my physical body would get some rest. I held up a hand and David pulled me to a sitting position. I dressed myself like a zombie with his help. When I was sleek in a sheath, David let me sit on a straight-backed chair while he did our packing.

He carried the luggage downstairs, then came back for me. I was sound asleep in the straightback chair. He practically carried me downstairs and poured me into the back seat of a Fiat.

Then he headed toward Nice.

It was dark when I came to, seeing neon lights and blazing electrics all over the Promenade des Anglais, which leads, along the Bord de Mer, to the airport. My chronometer told me it was two minutes past eight.

"Fast driving, you lug," I muttered.

"We'll make it," he yelled triumphantly.

I could get out of the car under my own power, though I ached all over in every way. I staggered along beside him to the counter where a pretty French girl had our tickets ready. David put our bags on the moving runway that would carry them to the baggage boys who would load them on the plane.

We headed for Gate 4. I put my head against his shoulder and fell asleep standing up. I was absolutely worn out. The last thing I heard was David talking to a man beside us.

"We're on our honeymoon," David chuckled.

"You must be a beast," a woman muttered angrily.

David put his arm around me and hugged me. "Good little kid. Got guts," he told everybody. I would have

kicked him except at that time my eyelids fell and I blanked out.

He shook me awake. "Easy, darling," he said so everyone could hear, helping me to walk through the gate. "I'll have you in a hotel bed just as soon as we get to Madrid."

I remembered the way he'd been amusing himself just before I went into dreamland. "Not again, darling," I pleaded with terror in my voice. "Please let me sleep. Don't wake me up to that with you again."

David went beet red. Teach him, the dog.

I felt better when the velveteen seat of the Iberia Airlines jet closed around my rump. I sagged my head against the backrest and let my eyelids lower. I was not so sleepy now, but I knew what was ahead of me, so I just drifted off.

The Madrid Hilton is scrumptious. There are a lot of Americans there, all of them reasonably well-to-do, so it is much like living at the Waldorf or the Hilton Americana in New York. We floated into the lobby with a cloud of bellhops carrying our luggage, and that of the other passengers from the plane.

We had a suite of rooms. L.U.S.T. does things right for its agents, I will admit. As soon as we got inside, David was on the phone to the General. I stripped down and took a long warm shower. I'd had enough sleep. I was bursting at the seams, ready for a night on the town.

I came out of the bathroom with a towel around me as David put down the phone. He said, "Everything's been arranged. The Rorwicks are in the air right now, flying here on a Trans-World Airlines jet. They ought to be meeting us in a few hours."

"You'll have to give them time to adjust to European time," I told him somewhat maliciously. "You can't expect to treat them the way you treat me. They don't work for you."

"They're being paid plenty. Free vacation and ten grand besides, for their expertise."

I let the towel drop and turned my back on my case officer. I bent over and lifted out a thin mini-slip from my suitcase. I was raising it to drape it over my head when David began growling.

"Where do you think you're going?"

"Out with you, darling. To eat."

"I need some rest. You've been sleeping ever since you got back to the Royal St. Georges."

"I make no apologies. After what I've been through I should spend two weeks in a hospital." I let my lower lip quiver, at which I have made myself quite adept. "You owe me, David," I added.

"Okay, okay. No tears."

"Good food and dancing is what I want, to take out the kinks. Besides," I went on maliciously, "your bride is too exhausted to do anything else."

He grinned. "Touché! Dine and dance it is."

David can be a doll, sometimes. I just have to handle him the right way. So I slithered the clinging mini-slip around my lush curves and let him look.

"Sure you wouldn't rather stay here?" he asked hopefully seeing how sheer the bit of Olga fluff and lace really was.

"Very sure," I muttered, sitting down and pulling a black nylon up my leg. I raised my eyes, looking at David who was looking at my leg. "Hadn't you better get dressed?"

He sighed and went to wash his body with soap and water in the enclosed shower. I kind of felt like a bride as I hoisted the mini-slip and wrapped a black lace and elastic garterbelt about my middle. It would be fun, eating in Madrid. And dancing. And then coming back to our hotel room. I hoped that the Rorwicks would be delayed by head winds.

We ate at the El Pupito, which is a restaurant with Old Spain flavor, lighted candles on the tables and a dimness all around us where the accent seemed to be on wonderful food flavors. We ate deep red *gamba*, the famous Medi-

terranean shrimp, and then polished off bowls of *zarzuela*, which is a kind of fish chowder filled with *cigala* crayfish and rosy-red *calamar*, which means squid.

The orchestra began to play about that time.

We danced close together, my head resting on David's big chest, listening to his heartbeat. From time to time I slid my thigh between his legs and moved it around. I wanted him to keep his attention on me, you understand, and not on the lovely señoritas who danced all around us with their escorts.

There was *toro de lidia*, grilled to a nicety, big thick steaks that fairly sizzled on the wooden platters. We dug in with knives and forks and ate until we felt bloated.

We danced some more, to slow music.

The crepes suzettes came in a brass chafing dish, flaming beautifully. The waiter spooned two crepes each onto our plates. I made a pig of myself, but I needed sustenance after what I'd been through.

Then there was coffee, good and strong, and a cigar for David while I puffed on a cigarette. We were both pleasantly happy and filled with languor. My case officer added to my languor by ordering a couple of *Tia Marias*. I sipped the cordial slowly, letting the music and the atmosphere wash over me.

It was a night to be remembered. We floated out of the restaurant and into a world of smiling faces and happy people. We came back to the Hilton in a taxi, huddled together, occasionally kissing. I felt a little like that bride David had named me. We were in a once-in-a-lifetime mood, both of us.

Being a girl spy isn't all shooting and torture. My life has its good sides, too. Actually, a philosopher might say that my life is like being on a roller-coaster. It has its ups and downs. From the torture of that metal cage to this evening was a long climb. But I had made it and I reveled in it.

The Rorwicks were sleeping in the hotel, we learned at the desk. They had left word that they would see us in the

morning. Arm in arm, my case officer and I marched for the elevator.

He was thinking the same thing that I was thinking. I felt his eagerness on the way up, but cautiously, so I wouldn't shock the elevator operator.

It took us two minutes to get undressed. It took us about five hours to fall asleep. David was at his most romantic, by which I don't necessarily mean his sexiest, though he was all of that as well. He wasn't in so much of a rush to get his own kicks. He was so considerate of me, as a matter of fact, that he had me babbling absolutely ridiculous things before he decided to do what I was talking about. He took his time; he was just groovy.

I slept with his arms wrapped around me.

The bubble had to break sometime.

The telephone did it. The Rorwicks were calling from the lobby. Were we at all interested in breakfast? We could talk about our plans over kippers or eggs or buckwheat cakes, plus coffee.

"Yeah," mumbled David blearily. He glanced at his wristwatch. We'd had about four hours sleep. But hell! It had been worth it. Even David admitted that, leaning over to kiss my nose.

"Sorry about this, honey, but we have to go to work."

"Yeah," I agreed, and kissed the dimple in his chin.

We met the Rorwicks in the dining room. They looked bright and chipper and very happy. They were drinking orange juice at the moment. As I sat, Marion told me she wanted to go shopping at the Rodriguez dress shop.

She looked at David as she said it, raising her eyebrows.

David looked glum. "I'm afraid not, Marion. That ghost spy is in Madrid, and the sooner we put Eve on his trail, the better."

"Oh! Well, all right. I can wait." She leaned across to whisper, "We have all we need with us. We can go to work at once, if you say so."

"I'm afraid I do," my case officer smiled. He glanced at

me and shrugged, moving his hands apart apologetically, telling us it was orders. David Anderjanian is rarely so considerate of my feelings when duty is involved, so I reached over and patted his hand forgivingly.

My pretend husband ate a big heap of buckwheat cakes and demolished a handful of sweetbuns, plus three cups of coffee. I was only going to nibble a croissant, since I was still full of food from last night. Martin Rorwick urged me to do better than that, assuring me that a full stomach would help me go into the trance more easily.

David had been telling us between bites of his buckwheat cakes and sausages that Astral Alex was in Madrid, but we didn't know just where. It was up to me to find him. And the easiest way to do that was for me to have another out-of-the-body experience where I could look all over the place for him in the flashing of an eyelid.

So it ended up with my eating scrambled eggs and bacon and sweetbuns and three cups of coffee. I told myself firmly I would go back on my normal diet tomorrow, after I'd done away with Astral Alex.

We went up to the Rorwicks' bedroom, which did not have the gracious sweep of our suite. We carried their gear down to our rooms. We stripped our beds of their mattresses and lugged them into the living room.

We got undressed.

David sat in an easy chair, eyeing Marion up and down as she bent to life her skirt hem up. She was something to look at, really, clad in gun-metal stockings and a red garterbelt, plus a lacy red brassiere that was as thick as a wet cobweb and through which her dark brown nipples stood up. I wanted to tell David to go take a walk in the hall, but Marion was only too well aware that he was admiring her curving contours, and the words stuck in my throat.

So I looked at Martin who was eyeballing me.

He was something to look at, too. He had muscles all over, in his bulging thighs and calves and even in his washboard-flat belly. His deep chest was covered with a

lot of curling black hairs, as was his lower torso. He flexed his muscular arms and smiled at me.

I pulled off my brassiere and smiled back at him.

His eyes told me he would like to do to me what David's eyes were telling his wife that he would enjoy doing to her as she slid out of her own brassiere, letting her heavy breasts dangle a moment before straightening up. Another part of him told me, too, and Martin flushed a little, glancing past me at my case officer.

My case officer did not see him. How could he, the way he was ogling Marion? I said, "Maybe David ought to leave the room." I stared at Marion as I added, "We mustn't have too strong an urge, must we?"

Marion sighed and shrugged her shoulders, making a big production out of it so David could watch her knockers bounce. "She may be right, David. We really do have to go into our trance, you know."

David got to his feet. "Some people are born killjoys," he mumbled. He walked out of the room, head held high.

We lay down on the mattresses and relaxed. I closed my eyes. I did not feel sleepy, but the breakfast did make me a little lethargic. I let the lethargy claim me. I tried to do what the Rorwicks had advised, thinking inward. I sought to get my concentrated thoughts deep down inside my brain.

"Here she is! Over here!"

It was a male voice, talking from inside me.

Chapter Five

I thought it was Martin Rorwick, at first.

"Yes, yes. I see her! I'm coming."

This was a woman speaking. Marion? I lay there and kept thinking into myself. The notion touched me that Martin and Marion knew damn well where I was. They would never have said anything like that! So I tried to open my eyes.

My eyelids were stuck tight. As a matter of fact, I was stuck tight all over. My body felt like cement block. I must have gotten down inside myself, all right. I was in the trance-like state that is the start of the conscious projection. The only trouble was, somebody was coming down inside my helpless body with me.

"Ah, yes. Now, comrade Ilya. Now!"

There was something inside me. I felt it, a strong will and a very powerful mind. Then another mind brushed against my own, slid into my head. My body held three separate identities.

I hit the panic button hard. It seemed to me that my astral body was running around inside my head trying to escape the delicate mental feelers that came hunting for it. I fled here and there, but I could not get away.

Something clamped onto my mind.

"I have her, Nikolas!"

"I too, Ilya!"

I was not inside my head any more.

I was standing on a beach that stretched for miles and

miles, as far as I could see, at the edge of a vast ocean. Behind me was a forest of weird, alien trees that seemed—alive. Their branches and leaves were turning toward me, reaching out as if to grip me.

I shook all over. The trees were—moving.

I stared at the ocean. I had to go in the water or the trees would get me. I put a toe in the water and it stung like acid. I pulled my foot out and my big toe was gone. Eaten away. The ocean was a huge sea of something like nitric acid, only worse.

I hobbled along the beach. But not fast enough. The trees came down to the edge of the acid sea and hemmed me in. Their branches slid through the air and tangled around my legs and arms.

The trees were bent far over, gripping me.

The branches flew up and the trees straightened.

This was a torture practiced on the young maidens of certain South Sea tribes. She is suspended upside down, her legs apart, each ankle held by a sapling that has been bent double and tied by rope to a stake in the ground. When the ropes are cut simultaneously, the saplings spring upright and tear the girl apart.

The tree branches tore me apart. What was left of me flew through the air. I was still alive.

"She suffers, Ilya!"

"I can sense it, yes!"

I was on a hot griddle, stretched out naked. My ankles and wrists were tied to wooden stakes. There was a deep pit under the griddle heaped with red-hot coals. I was being cooked alive. I screamed and screamed.

A man came to the edge of the griddle and stared at me. He had a Slavic face, and he was dressed in a Roman toga. There was a wreath on his head and he looked like a Russian playing the role of Nero.

He said, "I am going to cook you, young woman—and serve you to my guests."

Two slaves came with sharp knives and made incisions

in my body into which they poured herbs and spices. I went crazy.

"Tell her now, Nikolas!"

"Don't be soft, Ilya! She must be punished."

"I tell you, I am going to be sick!"

One of the things inside me was relaxing its hold. I was shuddering uncontrollably. I was going insane with this constant torture. What had happened to me in that cellar room at Igor's hands had been bad, but this was far worse because this was an agonizing torture of the spirit. Those minds that had hold of me were controlling my brain, especially the pain centers of it.

By mental telepathy, they were making me believe that these things happening to me were real! I felt them as if what went on inside my mind was a fact. I did not know how they were able to do it, but they were.

They gave me no rest.

I was on a great field of grey stones that stretched as far as I could see to a horizon where a leaden sky rose like a bowl over my head. I was naked. A cool damp wind whipped my flesh, but that was nothing. It was the atmosphere of this plain that was so horrifying. A terrible gloom held everything in its clutch. A sadness that was almost beyond the mind of man to imagine held me enthralled.

Tears were trickling down my cheeks. I shook with awful sobs. Every sorrow any man or woman has ever known was in my every pore. I fell to my knees, keening and wailing. It was as if I bore the weight of all the suffering in the world.

I wept because I could not help it.

I felt as if I was in Hell with all the fires out. There was no hope. In this purgatory, there was no such thing as hope.

Ilya was crying along with me.

"Stupid fool! Stop that!"

"I c-cannot help it. Her misery is—my misery!"

Ilya went away somewhere, but Nikolas stayed behind,

inside me. And now the misery and the deep melancholia, plus the pain and the agony of my tortured mind, fled away. Because I knew that I could deal with one mind, if I could summon up the will power.

I waited, crouched down in a corner of my brain like a hunted animal about to turn on its tormentor. Nikolas would make history for me soon. I was ready.

His mind lunged, enveloping my own. His mental suggestions, his powerful imagery, yanked me into that mental plane on which he had been torturing me with such delight. I was barefooted on hot, steaming volcanic soil, where reddish lava slowly flowed. From gaping fissures, steam came rising to blanket the upper air in a vast fog through which came droplets of burning water downward falling to sizzle on my bare hide. It was a blackish, deadly world with death waiting at one misstep.

And I laughed and reached!

My mind caught his mind. Ah, I felt it. I sensed the first surprise, the disbelief that such a thing could happen. He struggled a little, as if expecting his feeble efforts to get him free of me.

The world has long known that the Russians have been studying the experimenting in what are known as the extra-sensory sciences. Such things as mental telepathy, astral projection, levitation, clairvoyance, spiritualism, precognition, mind-reading, you name it and they are working on it. Hell! Why not? If their spies would laze around and send their minds to read the minds of American scientists or statesmen, they could disband the KGB!

Nikolas and Ilya were part of that psychic program, I felt sure. Only Ilya, being a woman, had known something of human decency and feeling. Not Nikolas. He was in here for the kill, being well aware that what happened to my brain would affect my body.

We grappled in that black land with the red lava, and slowly I saw the physical shape—the etheric double—of the man with whom I fought. He assumed his mental-body slowly; first, there were only the dark mists shifting

about in a narrow spot, then there were arms and legs and a head and he stood here locked hand to hand with me in savage combat. As I could be seen in this mental plane, so also could he.

He was a burly man with a thick mane of greying hair and a high forehead. I felt, looking at him, that he was more mystic than muscular. His arms and legs were thin, and there was an expression of utter terror in his bulging eyes.

His mouth opened and closed but he made no sound. Maybe there was no sound in this place. My hands tightened on his thin wrists, I whirled sideways.

I caught his leg with mine and applied pressure. He flew sideways through the air to land on his spine. I went after him in a low dive, landing on his belly with my knees. He looked shocked, horrified. Maybe the air went out of his real lungs, I cannot say. He acted as if it did, in this spirit body.

His hands clawed at my face but I'd had it. I knocked them aside and lunged. My thumbs went into his eyeballs. Sure, sure. This was not at all ladylike, but I had just suffered the torments of the damned and I was in no mood to be a do-gooder or turn the other cheek. My thumbs applied pressure.

His mouth opened in what might have been a long wail but I couldn't hear anything. His body flopped about crazily while I rode it as a bronco busting champion rides an untamed mustang.

He tore loose and tried to run.

I wasn't at all sure of the procedures in this kind of fight, but my female intuition was telling me that if I let him break contact his mind would break contact with my mind and I would lose touch with him. Next time he might come back with half a dozen cronies.

So I laid fingers on his ankle and toppled him. I inched my way upward over his bucking body and fastened my hands in his head-hair. I banged his face up and down on

the hard volcanic rock. He went limp after a little while and just lay there.

So he was unconscious. That meant I could decide what to do, without interruption. I didn't have too much time to decide, however, I looked around at the landscape, shuddering. My common sense was telling me I had to kill this mental-man. I wasn't sure what the effect would be upon his body, but the Russians had to learn a lesson.

I stared at the steaming red lava that flowed upward from a fissure. I rose to my feet, bent and raised the mental image of Nikolas to my shoulder. I staggered across the black, steaming soil to the edge of a fissure. I stared down into those awful depths, seeing the gleaming, bubbling redness far below. The lava would take this Nikolas into its seething, boiling depths and—obliterate him.

My hands lifted him. I flung him downward.

He must have recovered consciousness at the last moment, because his wail floated up to me like the cry of a soul forever damned.

My eyes opened.

David was staring down at me, his face a mask of contorted worry. Just beside him, with a wrapper thrown about her curves, was Marion Rorwick.

"My God," she breathed. "She's come out of it."

David gave a huge sigh. I think—I'm not sure about this, I was still too dazed to be certain—but I think there were tears in his lovely eyes.

"What happened?" he whispered.

"No," said Marion. "Don't question her now. Here, let me take over." She elbowed him aside, bent to put a cold towel to my forehead. "Just sleep, just sleep. Here, take this." She slipped a pill between my lips then raised my head so I could swallow water.

There was a blanket over me. I slept.

I woke up refreshed in my bed. David was sleeping in a chair, looking very uncomfortable. I felt fine. I reached over, caught hold of my traveling clock and saw it was a

little past six. Judging from the faint light coming through the pulled-down windowshades, it was morning.

I closed my eyes.

At eight o'clock I woke up to find David prowling around like a caged panther. At my greeting he practically leaped to the bed and sat gingerly on its edge.

"I'm all right," I assured him, holding his hand.

He breathed gratitude. I said, "I'm starving. Order me a huge meal. Steak and French fries with a Caesar salad and the trimmings. I'll tell you what happened after I've eaten."

He called Martin and Marion Rorwick to the room and I told them exactly what had taken place inside my head when Ilya and Nikolas had come to play their mental tricks on me. The Rorwicks listened gravely.

When I finished, Martin said softly, "Your Nikolas will be a vegetable from now on, I believe. A madman. Let me explain.

"You yourself were in a coma, Eve. Your body was like cement. Hard, unmoving. Even your flesh seemed turned to marble. It was similar to the trance condition from which Marion and I would have released your astral self. We could not touch your etheric body however, because your mind—or your etheric body itself—was somewhere else, carried off by Ilya and Nikolas.

"There they tortured you as you have told us. Both their minds were too much for yours to overcome alone. How they did it—by mental telepathy, making you imagine all these things, which didn't make them anytheless painful—or by a method of slipping their astral bodies inside your own—I'm not sure.

"Anyhow, they did get to you."

"And they may try again," commented Marion.

David raised his eyebrows. "What does that mean?"

"They're out to protect this Aleksandr Tkachevich. The only way they can do it, apparently, is by having their expert mental telepathists try to drive Eve as mad as

I believe she drove Nikolas. Then she wouldn't be any good to you at all."

"Yeah," I breathed, shivering. "What do we do, David?"

"We call it quits, for the moment."

I stared at him, not quite believing what he had said. "You're kidding! Look. I'm here to do a job. I think they'll be scared off, after what happened to Nikolas. They aren't going to make any more attempts on my brain. So I'm free to look around and find Alex."

"I don't like it," he growled.

"What's the difference if they come after me with guns or strong minds?" I shivered again and said, "Though I admit I don't like to think of myself as a madwoman, or a—a vegetable without any mind at all."

"That's just what I mean."

Marion patted my hand. "Perhaps Martin and I can go along to protect you in some way." Her husband nodded his head.

We argued David down. I believe the Rorwicks were eager for some adventure, and I wasn't afraid of Astral Alex as I was of those mind-benders or whatever they called themselves. David scowled and shook his head, not convinced at all; he wanted to telephone the General.

"Tell you what," I offered. "If we see there's any danger, we'll beat it back inside our bodies, pack our bags and go home with our tails between our legs."

"David nodded. "All right, we'll do it. I've contacted the Spanish police, they're going to give us every help they can. They don't like the idea of a ghost spy any more than we do. You and the Rorwicks go into your trance. I'll be busy working from a different angle."

I got out of bed and slipped a wrapper on. Then I gave David a farewell kiss, and moved over to the mattress in the next room. We all slipped off our clothes. I had to remove a wrapper and my nightgown, and then we lay down on the mattresses.

Martin said, "Remember, get down deep inside your

head. Open that doorway so Marion and I can pull you through."

I nodded and closed my eyes. I felt myself withdrawing from the world around me, my ears heard no noises, my astral body drew back from my arms and legs, from my torso. I imagined I was a little ball inside my head. This was the trance condition, I knew. I was not asleep, not yet awake.

I felt something inside me, touching me. Marion! I reached for her hand, stretched out my left so Martin could grasp that. They helped my spirit self sit up. They were golden statues, standing on either side of me and smiling down. I rose to my feet, nodding my head.

"No trouble?" asked Martin.

"Everything's fine."

"Then let's go hunting."

We rose upward, hand in hand.

Through the hotel, floor by floor, we moved like drifting smoke to the rooftop and beyond. There is a method of astral journeying called skrying. Skrying is where a person wills to ignore the pull of gravity and can travel high into the sky, even out into space itself. And so we skryed for a little while.

We did not want to go so far, but we did need a bird's eye view of the city, so we could pick our targets to be examined. When we were a thousand feet up, Martin nodded and we broke our handholds.

Below us spread the city of Madrid, glinting in the Spanish sunlight. I could make out the greenery of the Jardin Botanico, and beside it the much larger spread of Del Retiro Park. On the opposite side of the city were the gardens of the Campo del Moro, once the property of the Crown, but now open to the public. I saw the cathedral and the palace, the Palacio Liria and the great bulk of the Pardo Museum.

Then we were whisking off to the south, toward a section of cheaper hotels. Marion, who was more sensitive to

these things than I, and perhaps her husband as well, had discovered something.

Just as we came down toward a little rooming house, we saw a flash of golden light. Another astral body. It was Aleksandr Tkachevich, all right. He turned his horrified face toward us, and dove like a stone back toward his body where it lay reclining on a bed.

We went after him. The Rorwicks held back at a wave of my hand. Now that I could go almost as fast as he. We dropped through a roof, past two floors, and into a small room with whitewashed walls where a crucifix hung beside a framed Goya print.

His body was on the bed. His spirit was trying to slip inside it. Once in his flesh, he would be safe enough from my spirit self, so I lunged and grabbed his wrist. I locked the fingers of both hands around it and yanked. We played tug-of-war for several moments.

Ordinarily, I believe Astral Alex would have been able to free himself from my grip. But he had seen the other two astral bodies beside me and he must have assumed that they were coming for him too, which plunged him into a blue funk. He struggled, but so weakly it was not too hard to pull him right out of his physical body, much as Marion and Martin Rorwick were able to do to me.

He screamed and slapped at me with his free hand. His eyes bulged in fright, his mouth was opening and closing. I know what he had in mind. If I were to knock him unconscious in some manner, I could inhabit his body and perhaps cause him to commit suicide.

It was in my mind, I will admit that.

But he gathered strength from his very despair. I believe. His blows grew heavier, stronger. While it is true that a physical body cannot harm the astral form, another astral form can do so. My head rocked back and forth until I was seeing astral stars.

I let go of him and dove for his empty body. He caught me and dragged me back. So I forgot about his physical body and devoted my talents to punishing the astral one.

My judo blows caught him in the head and across the neck, dropping him to his knees.

My knee rammed into his face.

Both hands clasped across his nose, he reeled back. I grabbed his hair and his arm and threw him across the room. I should have known better. He went right through the wall and out of sight. I whirled to enter his empty body.

I slid inside it. His body was strange to me, it would take time to gain control of it. And while I lay there, sliding deeper into arms and fingers, feet and toes, sliding into the convolutions of his brain—

They came to me!

But Nikolas, but Ilya—and two others!

They must have been waiting, wherever they were, their minds attuned to his brainwaves, because at my entrance they came flooding in and locked their combined mental powers around me.

I could not move.

“Destroy her!”

“Show no mercy! You saw what she did to Nikolas!”

I fought as savagely as I knew how. I broke free of the arms and legs of the physical body that encased me and writhed backward out of his torso. But I was caught in the brain patterns that had taken me so long to learn. I threw off one mind after the other, at the same time striving to twist myself out of the brain I'd been so eager to inhabit. Once I got out of this physical body, those minds couldn't hurt me.

It was a near thing.

They laid hold, and by their combined mental powers—

I was being dragged into a white land over which a dark blue sky brooded. There were silver trees lush with fruit and foliage that quivered in a strange, terrifying manner. The leaves dipped down as if to grapple my body, and from the fruit fell huge purple drops which stung with awful agony as they hit my golden flesh.

“We will give her to the trees!”

"There is no escape from them!"

"She will hang here forever—in terrible pain!"

They were feeding me to the leaves that were like suction cups. These four minds lifted me in ethereal hands, higher until the leaves could slide their suckers over my arms and back and raise me slowly and inexorably upward. Purple fruit swayed above me and a rain of drops fell on my golden skin.

I screamed and screamed.

There was no escape from that awful torment. No matter how I swayed and swung, the leafy branches held me and the fruit gave with my swayings as if magnetized by my body. I hung spreadeagled and the purple drops bit into me and stung as they touched my breasts and belly and slid downward into my private parts.

When the purplish drops touched my genitals, I went mad.

I bucked and flopped, twisted and flung myself from side to side. I bumped and shook, I flailed as best I could at the air around me. The stuff was dripping into my eyes now, stinging, burning, blinding me.

"She will be like that forever."

"There will be no hope. None!"

The voices receded, went far away.

I was alone in my own astral plane hell.

I moaned and whimpered. I sobbed. I lost all strength, just hanging limp and despairing, without the power to move so much as a finger.

And then—

A woman whispered, "Dear God! Look at her!"

A hand touched my ankle. Another hand came to join it. Two bigger hands locked themselves about my other ankle. The hands tugged. The leaves clung with desperate hunger to my arms and back. It felt as if my skin were being torn out.

The hands were too strong. Slowly they freed me.

An arm came free and then the leaves were gone from my back. I was still blind, I was covered with the purple

ichor. The leaves let go of my other arm. I fell downward, to collapse in a heap on the white ground.

The hands picked me up, lifted me, bore me away. . . .

I stood shuddering on the floor beside the physical body of Aleksandr Tkachevich. Marion and Martin Rorwick stood beside me, their golden faces mirroring the shocked horror they were feeling. I discovered that I was sobbing steadily.

"Come with us, Eve. Come on," breathed Marion.

"Up into the air, like a good girl," agreed her husband.

I went with them, forcing myself. The pain was gone. Apparently, it was only by mental contact with the brain of Aleksandr Tkachevich that I was able to feel that terrible agony. Once contact with his physical brain had been broken, everything that was happening to me died out.

We flew through the air, straight for the Castellana Hilton. . . .

I opened my physical eyes. I was no longer blind but the memory of what had happened was still so sharp, so real, that I burst into sobs.

"Eve, Eve—please don't," Marion whimpered, turning to take me into her arms. She held me close to her, soothing me by running her palms up and down my back.

"Leave us for a little while," she told her husband.

Marion patted my bare behind with her hand, as she might do to a baby. I wept and wailed on her own bare shoulder for long moments. She pushed my wet blonde hair away from my face and kissed my eyelids closed. She murmured little nothings to my receptive ears.

"There, my darling—golden doll—nothing more will happen, you're with me—I know ways to make pretty girls like you forget their troubles and their pains . . . nice ways . . . sweet caresses. . . ."

Her sultry voice was penetrating my senses, just as her soft palms were sliding over my bare buttocks and up my sides. I rolled over on my back and let her hands slip beneath my breasts. It may have been the remembered pain

in my hand or just the slithering touch of her fingers across my breast-bowls, but a terrible heat was gathering in my loins.

I needed this comforting, very badly.

Something or someone had to replace my pains with love, with ecstasy. Marion, being another female, was aware of this, perhaps subconsciously. And so she devoted herself to the task, slowly and with utter tenderness.

Her head bent, her ripe red mouth was close to my nipples as she breathed, "Darling mounds, like half-moons. So white, so smooth!" Her red-nailed fingertips slid upward and over my breast flesh, bending the hardening nipples. Her fingers closed about them, gently shook them.

I moaned in happiness.

I could feel her breath on my flesh. Then her wet tongue slipped out from between her lips and tasted my breast. She gave a little cry of delight and I felt her whole tongue run moistly over my hard breast to the nipple and around it, laving and loving my skin.

My own hands lifted and I placed them on her thick brown hair, using my fingertips to caress her ears and throat. Her body wriggled in pleasure as my fingers went across her satin shoulders to her armpits where the smooth skin was damp and sticky. I dropped my hands to her breasts.

She raised her face from my breasts, mouth slightly open and eyes narrowed. In my hands her heavy breasts were like big fruits, with the dark brown nipples jutting firmly.

"Oh, yes. Oh my God, yes!" she whimpered.

Her body jerked as I caught her elongated nipples between my forefingers and thumbs and lazily rotated them back and forth. I did not know at this time that Marion Rorwick was very much like myself. Bisexual in nature, she could enjoy the embraces of a man or of a woman with equal pleasure.

"Give them to me," I told her hungrily.

She raised herself until her hanging breasts dangled just above my open mouth. Then she lowered a long nipple between my lips. I think she was surprised at my eagerness to return her embraces; when I began to suckle she gave a low cry of amazed enjoyment.

"Oh, darling. Oh, Eve! Nurse on me, nurse me."

I loved her breasts, first one and then the other, back and forth, until she was shivering mass of happiness. My hand slipped from her breast to her belly and below to the tangled hairs of her privacy. Her plump thighs widened and she caught my hand and drew it between them.

Her hips bucked wildly.

She must have remembered that she was the one who was supposed to be comforting me, I guess, because she tore her nipple from my lips and bent her head to my breast tips. Her mouth was warm, moist. With it she fed as much delight to my body as that purple ichor had fed pain. I whimpered and rolled my hips, I widened my thighs, I invited her to partake of the goodies however and whenever she pleased.

I had completely forgotten my former pain and fright in this instant of ecstatic forgetfulness. All I could feel, the only thing I knew was the delight of wet lips moving on my nipples and the hesitant caress of quivering fingers where my body bled its pleasure to the air.

My own loins worked. I yelled, I believe, because Marion panted, "Hush, dear Eve. Hush, hush!"

Now she raised her left knee and straddled my face. Looking up I could see her own needs, plainly and starkly exposed to my stare. My hands slipped upward on her outer thighs, upward to grip the fleshy buttocks. She was in position, she lowered her face to my yearnings.

The posture known as sixty-nine is a lesbian hang-up. It has been depicted in ancient statuary, the Greek vase decorations and painted bowls. It was known to the old Romans and had been depicted in their erotic cameos on wall murals in Pompeii. There are clay and metal stat-

uettes, bronze lamps and urns that show this particular form of lovemaking.

I was not thinking about any of this, while Marion Rorwick was flooding my nerve ends with the delights of her lips and tongue. I was just shaking and jerking all over and trying to pay her back as best I could. Yeah, I was out of my skull with pleasure.

I was becoming myself again. The old Eve Drum, the Oh Oh Sex of L.U.S.T. no longer the poor tormented soul those mind-beings had hung on a bunch of sticky leaves in never-never land. Bless Marion for her understanding, I thought as I blasted off into my lingual caress.

My hands tightened about her hips, my fingers digging into her plump buttocks, as I played the part of Sappho with Mnasiidika to the shuddering, jerking enjoyment of Marion Rorwick. She raised her head and howled out her fierce delight. It was a wail that was shut off in mid-syllable as her somewhat heavy thighs closed around my ears and tightened, shutting off all noise.

Then Marion was turning, kissing my knee and up my thigh. Her thick brown hair had fallen in a loose spill and was tickling my flesh as her head moved. She was crooning wordlessly to me, telling me that she had never been in such ecstasy, that she wanted it to go on and on, without stop. Her ripe mouth was at my swollen nipples, kissing, then it was sliding up my throat to my own lips.

We were kissing furiously when the door opened.

Her husband came into the room.

Chapter Six

I stared at him above her brown hair as she kissed my throat, making me squirm with the ministrations of her soft palms sliding up and down my hips and outer thighs. I could not have moved for all the Reds in Russia. She was getting to me again where I lived, and I didn't want all this pleasure to end.

Martin grinned when he saw us.

We must have presented quite a sight at that, with me sprawled out naked on the mattress and Marion half over me with her pale white buttocks offered to her mate's stare. A lot of husbands would have been shocked and horrified: men have a funny viewpoint about such things. Martin Rorwick, I was glad to see, was a bit of a swinger. He even chuckled.

As he came across the room, he undid the bathrobe he was wearing. When it fell open, his maleness leaped into view. He was as erotically aroused as his wife or myself. Instead of being in a jealous rage, he wanted in on the fun.

His bathrobe slipped to the rug. He knelt down on the other side of me and began to kiss my heavy breast where it was exposed, shoving out of Marion's hand that held it. His lips fastened to my nipple and I moaned.

His wife raised her head. I watched her brown eyes through my eyelashes since my own eyes were almost closed while I shook like a leaf in a high wind as both

man and wife worked on me. Her ripe lips curved into a voluptuous smile.

"She isn't afraid any more, Marty. Are you, Eve?"

"Oh, God—no," I moaned.

Usually I am the one who sets the pace in matters sexual. I have read all the old masters of making love, studied the tomes of Elephantis and Paxamus, Ovid and Suetonius, plus others, until I consider myself a walking encyclopedia of erotica. But right now I was content to writhe and twist under male lips that suckled my nipples and beneath female lips that wandered from my belly to my mons veneris.

Never before had a husband and wife team worked on me.

Troilism is a feature of sexual lore that has been known even before his two daughters got together with Lot, as told about in the Bible. The term comes from the French, deriving from the word *trois*, meaning three. It is a threefold way of doing your thing, and a great deal of the excitement attached to it comes from performing in front of, or with a third person.

Writers on the subject have claimed that troilism is far more common in England today than wife or husband swapping, and since that itself has become quite the rage, you can just about imagine how much fun the other is. Where such an attachment becomes more or less permanent—as if the Rorwicks and I agreed to live together—it is known as a *menage à trois*. Some of these arrangements are homosexual in nature, as well. And I suppose they please the exhibitionist in all of us.

It gave Martin Rorwick a big charge to display the extent of his excitement, both to me and to his wife, knowing that he was going to have me, a sexual stranger, in the presence of his legal mate. It did something to his libido and to his hormones, I suppose, making him more potent than ever.

Psychologists explain that the wife who helps her husband have relations with another female in her presence,

is satisfying a latent lesbian urge. Well, I knew by this time that Marion Rorwick went both ways, her little idyll with me was proof enough of that. And Martin was like any other male; he was more than willing to sample a hitherto unknown female pussy cat.

The story of Oedipus, in which son and father vie for the love of the mother, is a prime example of incestuous troilism, as is the story of Lot. The sleep-in maid or housekeeper of the present is sometimes the love partner of the man and woman who pay her salary. When a husband and wife go barhopping they often have troilism in mind. A lot of permanent arrangements come out of these chance meetings, too.

Martin breathed, "I can't wait!"

His wife smiled, looking at him as he rose to his feet and stood over us with his legs spread apart, like some kind of carnal colossus. If they had united forces to take my mind off my troubles, they had succeeded brilliantly. I didn't give a hoot in Hades for Astral Alex and his telepathic protectors. All I was interested in was Martin, who was starting to kneel down as his wife caught my thighs and gently drew them apart.

Then the man was lunging and I was crying out in crazy happiness. I barely noticed that Marion was getting behind me and kneeling; not until I saw her face above mine did I realize that she was there, a partaker of the merrymaking. She lowered her parted lips, kissing my mouth. Her hands went to my breasts.

There was an erotic eternity of mad thrills while both husband and wife entertained me with their amorous tricks. I bounced around and up and down. I treid to cry out my delight but my wails were lost between the soft lips that battened on my mouth. And the way in which Martin was attacking me down below, the man seemed starved for just such a love-bout as this.

I gave them their heads. I lost my own.

Sex is a mighty powerful force in most people. It was and is in me. I gave myself over to that triangular tangling

the way a thirsty man gulps water. I held nothing back, I clung to Martin with my legs and to Marion with my arms and lips. I denied them nothing.

For hours this went on. We changed positions, I knelt over Marion while her husband enjoyed her, knowing I was watching in admiration of his staying powers. I knelt over her face and leaned to kiss him while she devoted her Sapphic wisdom to my enjoyment. I whimpered and wailed right along with her, as if in erotic echo to her own amoral cries.

We slept, exhausted.

I awoke under a blanket that somebody had pulled over my nakedness. I luxuriated in my animal warmth, stretching and smiling, happy to be alive. There was a kind of subdued anger in me, released by my pussycat passions, that was directed against the secret Russian agents who had been torturing me mentally. The fact that it was mental hadn't made it any less painful. All pain is mental, in the sense that the human nerve ends send messages to the mind.

I wanted to pay back the Russians for what they'd done to me. I got up and padded into the shower. I laved myself with soap and hot water until I felt nice and clean. Then I got dressed, wondering where David had lost himself.

He came in just before I went down to dinner.

"I've been with the police, hunting all over Madrid for your pal, Astral Alex, with those pictures our artist made from the files you showed him. And I think we've come up with something, Eve."

We dined in the hotel restaurant, over plates of *bacalao a la Viscaína*, which is codfish served with a tasty tomato sauce, and *angulas* or eel flavored chili peppers. There was also *paolla*, which was rice and saffron flavored with various types of seafood. We enjoyed a bottle of *chacoli* wine with the meal, and afterwards, for a dessert, we feasted on Moorish cake called *yemas*, and American coffee.

David filled me in while we ate.

Aleksandr Tkachevich was settled in a small hotel off the Puerta del Sol, in that maze of narrow streets and alleyways that form such a contrast to the Madrid which most American tourists see. They still use gas lamps in these old quarters of the city, where a big car cannot go. Donkeys travel here, their hooves clip-clopping along unhurriedly on their way to market, along with the men and women who live in these older quarters.

The police were waiting for David to give the word for a raid. They were cooperating with us because somebody in our State Department had contacted someone in authority, and word had come down to the Chief of Police to put his men at our disposal.

"Just say the word," I smiled over the coffee.

David Anderjanian nodded. "Good. Maybe we can finish up our job tonight. I'd like that. Then we could stay on a day or two. I've never seen the Escorial—that's a kind of monastery palace where the kings and queens of Spain are buried and—"

"I know what it is," I told him a little tartly. David always treats me like a stupid child unless there's danger, when he hurls me into the breach as if I were a female Horatio at the bridge. "There are gardens there too, and lots of courtyards and patios. I'd like to visit it myself."

"Then let's go get our job done, honey."

He made a phone call from our room while I was changing into a turtleneck sweater and slacks. I wore a jacket with this outfit because it had a special pocket that was half a holster, made to contain my Belgian Bulldog. David went as he was, in shirt and tie and striped charcoal grey suit.

When we came out on the street there was an unmarked police car waiting for us. The driver was uniformed as a chauffeur but he was a detective; he told us there were more than twenty policemen in disguises scattered around the streets where the little hotel faced. With any luck, we hoped to get them all.

David and I got in the back seat.

The detective drove with perfect skill through the streets. He swung off onto the Calle Carmen and then turned into one of the wider alleyways. We would go the rest of the way on foot.

It was approaching midnight. This corner of Madrid was poorly lighted, the shadows were long and black. Apparently someone had forgotten to put a quarter in the gas meter, if they've such things here, because I could hardly see my hand in front of my face, as the old Little Audrey jokes used to say. I walked with a shoulder brushing David for reassurance.

When we got to the alleyway—it had no name, I noticed—two drunken bums, lying down with their back to a brick wall, opened their eyes and winked at us. I'd never have thought them to be cops. The detective nodded his head, then whispered in an aside that the hotel entrance was across the street. David put a hand on my shoulder.

"Go right in, Eve. Their rooms are two and four on the third floor. Detective Barca here will be with you. Good luck."

Remember what I'd said about his shoving me into danger? This was David Anderjanian on his finest behavior. I nodded and patted his forearm. "I'll do my best, chief."

"You'd better," he growled.

We went across the narrow street and into the hotel. Detective Barca put his hand inside his chauffeur uniform and loosed his service revolver. I brushed my own fingertips across the pearl-handled Bulldog.

Then we were inside the tiny lobby, and moving toward the stairs. The clerk never lifted his head from a newspaper. I think the police had scared the living insides out of him. He wanted no piece of this action.

The third floor had a long hall with treadworn carpeting running down its planks. Numbers two and four were on the right. I lifted my hand to knock.

The door opened.

I was face to face with Ilya, the gal who'd reneged and left Nikolas on his own in our mental encounter. She was a pretty thing, with a broad Slavic face and enigmatic grey eyes. She showed emotion right now, however. Surprise gave way to alarmed recognition. Oh, she knew me, all right. She ought to, she had taken part in torturing me a short time back.

As her jaw dropped, I hit her in the belly. With my fist. I would never attempt such a blow against a man, but the big round breasts pushing into her blouse told me Ilya was no man, even if I'd never made her acquaintance before.

She doubled up, sick. The edge of my right hand took her across the back of her neck. She went down at my feet and lay there jerking a little. I stepped over her body and into the room.

Three men sat at a table facing me, stunned into immobility by the swiftness of my attack. Two of them had been playing chess, the third man being an onlooker. Their faces were forever etched in my memory; these had been the three who had taken me into that world of white ground and silver fruit trees and given me to the leaves of their branches. I owed them.

I took two fast steps forward and grabbed the edge of the table, ramming it into the chest of the third man, the onlooker. As he went backwards, my rigid hands flew sideways in a combination karate blow. One hand landed on the bridge of a nose; I heard a very satisfying crunching sound as cartilage mashed. The other man I caught just under his nose, driving his head upward. He screeched in sudden pain, since the nose is a very tender object, indeed.

I leaped onto the table and my hands went to their long hair. My fingers tangled in their greasy locks, and yanked their faces down to the tabletop. Their faces made satisfactory thuds on the wood. Chessmen bounced and rolled as their heads struck the tabletop a double blow.

I did not release their hair. I yanked them sideways so that they toppled off their chairs. My right knee met his nose as my leg came upward.

I swung around and put both hands into the hair of the other man. I drove his temple sideways into the table edge.

The third man was getting to his feet.

I shoved the table forward.

He had his gun half out of an inside pocket when the table took him across the throat. I was mad with fury. These men had left me to live forever in that crazy world where the fruit dropped purple ichor that stung and pained. They'd had no mercy toward me. As the table slammed into his throat, it nearly took his head off.

"*Dios!*" breathed a voice in my ear. "Stop it! You will kill them! Please—let them alone!"

It was the detective, registering horror.

The three men were on the floor, moaning and clutching their injured faces and throats. I looked down at the with cold eyes.

"You don't know what those bastards did to me," I snarled.

I wasn't half through with them, so I reached for them again. But the detective grabbed my wrist and yanked me away by brute force. He yelled, "The other, the man we are after. . . ."

"Yeah, what about him?" I growled.

I ran for the door. Number four was right next door. I didn't want Astral Alex to get away but I think he heard the commotion in room number two because the door was open into number four and there was nobody in it.

I hesitated a long moment, staring around at the little bed, the table and chair. There was a crucifix on the white-stuccoed wall. I think all Spanish hotels in the lower quarter have these crucifixes, the way hotels in the United States used to—and still do, for the most part—have Bibles.

Except for me, the room was empty.

I leaped for the hall. Ilya was leaning her behind against it, still bent over. She showed signs of reviving life, so I took time out to grab her long yellow hair and ram her skull into the stucco. She collapsed and dropped to the floor. Then I whirled and ran past rooms six, eight, and ten until I was at a landing that had a ladder above it. Over the ladder and set into the ceiling was a trap door. The door of the trap was open. I was betting that Astral Alex had gone this way, so I leaped for the ladder, yanked it down, and mounted toward the ceiling.

I went into the little attic above the third floor like a football fullback hitting the line. I was laying odds that Astral Alex in the flesh was as cowardly as he was in his etheric body. If he'd stayed to drive a shoe into my face, he would have toppled me back down the ladder and onto the landing.

He was nowhere in sight, but the window at the far end of the attic was open. I ran to it, peered out. The rooftops were very close here, there was one not five feet below this one. And running across a further roof was Aleksandr Tkachevich. I slid a leg over the windowsill and dropped to the roof below.

I ran like a deer across the rooftop, gaining on my quarry. Below us was the sound of Madrid at night, filled with the hum of distant traffic and the occasional thump of boot heels on the cobblestones. Overhead the stars made a glory of the night and the moon was a tiny crescent of silver. There were cooking smells rising from the rooms below, in which that of fish soup—*sopa de pescade*—fought with the more distinctive aroma of *fabara*, which is a combination of white beans with salt pork or sausages. It was long past the supper hour, but the odors lingered on.

Up ahead, Astral Alex had come to the end of the rooftops. He paused a moment, glanced back at me, and stiffened. Wildly he looked around him, then down at the street below. There was a slanting roof down there, covering some sort of shed. He paused, and I rather imagine

he licked his quivering lips with a nervous tongue. It was a good drop to that roof, but it would break his fall, and then he would have an easy jump to the cobblestones of the street itself.

My hand went for my Belgian Bulldog.

A bullet in his leg would stop him. He would not do any running or jumping then. I came to a stop and yanked my revolver free just as he dropped to his hands and knees and slid over the side.

He made no target at all as he clung to the rooftop. All I could see were his fingers, and not much of them. I hesitated, pushed the gun back into my pocket, and ran on. I saw the fingers slide, heard a faint cry of alarm from Astral Alex, then a thump as he hit the shed roof and slid down it.

I came up to the roof from which he had dropped. He was far below me, on the ground. I turned and lowered myself, clinging to the rooftop. I breathed a little faster and my heart began to slam, but I had to do what he had done. I let go the roof edge.

I fell like a stone.

My legs rammed up into my torso and as I hit the slanting roof, I tried to keep my balance but it was no go. I fell over and began rolling. I saw the street cobbles under me and Aleksandr Tkachevich who was standing now and staring up at me. Then I was flailing the air and turning over, and the street came up to grab me.

I landed and bounced.

My quarry was not waiting to see what happened to me. He was off and running and didn't look back. I groaned to the ache of shaken bones but I made it to my feet and went after him.

The streets were narrow, the stuccoed walls of the little buildings brushed against us as we ran. There were steps in the streets down which we raced and in the dark these steps came close to tumbling us both off our feet and slamming us into the building walls or an occasional street fountain.

I had my revolver in my hand again.

I steadied a moment and aimed for his leg. I fired. The report made an explosive sound in the night air. A dozen or more windows were thrown up and heads poked out into the darkness. I ran on, ignoring the screams and curses that followed me.

I saw Astral Alex turn a corner, unprepared for the shallow step that presented itself as the ground sloped downwards. He went through the air and thudded into a building wall on the far side of the street. He sagged downward to his knees and lay there shaking his head dazedly, as I came up to him.

I said, "Give up, buster."

He turned his face and looked at me, seeing the revolver in my hand and my face above it. A sick expression touched his features. He nodded slowly and got to his feet.

And then—

"Take her, Ilya!"

"Yes, I've made contact and—"

I stood rigid. I could not move a muscle. Even my eyelids seemed made of stone. I was horrified, overcome with stark terror. Oh, I knew what was happening to me. Those Russian mental telepathists—even though they might be in the hands of David Anderjanian and the Spanish police—were using their combined mental powers to interfere with me!

I think my quarry realized what was happening.

He crouched, staring hard at me. Maybe he saw the terror in my eyes and their slightly glazed condition. Because hope warred with despair in his face and he laughed suddenly, with delight. He could have taken the revolver out of my hand and shot me, of course, but all he had on his mind was getting the hell out of there.

He turned and ran.

I stood there like a dummy. My hand still held the gun, and my feet itched to go after him, but I could not move. Those combined minds inside my skull were refusing to

release their mental grip on my brain's *globus pallidus*, that controls the motor responses of the human body. They had zeroed in on my brain waves and clamped their holds on me.

There was no painful imagery involved, like that world of white soil, black skies, and silver trees with purple fruit. No, no. They just gripped my mind and held me like chains. I could not burst them to free myself.

Then, suddenly they were gone.

The gun fell out of my hand in my surprise. I bent and picked it up and shoved it into my pocket and ran after Astral Alex. I had little hope of overtaking him; I must have played at statues for more than five minutes. But I ran on until I found myself emerging onto the Plaza Del Callao. There were many lights here, and a bustle of early morning traffic. I hunted up a taxi and waved it down.

"The Castellana Hilton," I told the driver, and sank back into the upholstery of the rear seat. I had flubbed it. I'd been a washout this night. My job had been to lay hands on Aleksandr Tkachevich, and I'd let him slip through my fingers like a novice.

I felt lousy about it.

To my surprise, David Anderjanian was very understanding and sympathetic. He had returned to the hotel from the police station where he had been booking Ilya and the other Russians. He nodded when I explained how I had frozen solid and been unable to go after Astral Alex.

"I thought as much. Those four weirdos went into some sort of trance on the way to the police station. I never noticed it until we arrived. They were all just sitting there with their eyes open and a faraway look in them. I wasn't sure, you understand, but I reached in and slapped their faces hard, one after the other. That brought them out of their trances, fast."

"That must have been when I was freed." I stared up at David in something approaching horror. "What are we

going to do, David? If I have those four harpies on my tail all the time, I'll never be able to do my job!"

"Yeah. I've thought about that."

"And?"

He sat down heavily, a stricken look on his face. "Those four are the flower of the psychic development program of the Russians that began with Doctor Vasiliev's researches, Eve. They've done a lot of research in this parapsychic program of theirs. Now we've run straight into its results."

David wanted to say something. He was afraid.

Then it came to me. "They have to die," I said harshly.

His eyes stopped their study of the rug to look at me. "I can't see any other way out. But we can't tell the police. They wouldn't stand for it."

"There may be another way," I said slowly. "If we kill them, we'll never learn anything from them."

"So tell me what you have in mind."

"Bail them out. Take them to one of our air bases. Shoot them full of drugs so they can't use their paranormal powers to affect my mind again."

David rubbed his jaw thoughtfully. "We could do that, yes."

"Then fly them stateside. Turn them over to our own parapsychic experts so they can study them. But for Pete's sake—keep them apart. As individuals, they can't do very much, but all together—like wow, man!"

"All right, I'll handle that end of it. But now, what about Tkachevich? He's gone and we've got to find him. He's too dangerous to be left loose; and besides, he knows things about our plan that we can't let fall into opposition hands."

"I suppose I could go looking for him in my astral form," I giggled. "I can really cover ground that way, David. You'd be amazed."

"I'll go scout up the Rorwicks."

I wasn't sure whether I wanted to come face to face with the Rorwicks just yet. We'd had a ball, the three of

us, but I was a little unsure of how they would react when we met again. Would they want another bout of three-way tail jabbing? Or would they be all business, the way it was supposed to be?

I needn't have worried. They were serious and concerned when David and I sought them out. They explained what had happened and offered to free my etheric body from my physical one again. Maybe they'd had second thoughts as to what had happened between us. They smiled almost shyly at sight of me, and then listened as David outlined his plans.

"We can do whatever you say," Martin offered. "As a matter of fact, we can give Eve a hand in hunting down this Alex fellow. Remember, Marion and I have both seen him, when we went with Eve to his room.

Martin nodded. "Yes. And we'd be happy to."

David got to his feet, rubbing his hands together. "Fine, fine. I'll leave you three to do your job, then. I have problems of my own."

Marion held out her hand to me as the door closed behind my case officer. "Come on, honey. No fooling around, this time. We know how important it is to you to catch this ghost spy, so we want to help as much as we can."

We got undressed and lay down on the mattresses.

I was getting real good at astral voyaging, because I was soon locked inside a trance and felt the etheric hands of Marion and Martin Rorwick questing for my own. They raised me out of my body with practised ease.

Martin waved a hand toward the south, indicating he would handle that. He said, "You take the north. Marion will go east."

I nodded, then watched them rise upward through the ceiling. To vary things, I moved toward the wall and windows of the room and through them until my astral body was hovering above the Paseo de la Castellana. Then I swivelled around and moved northward, soaring over the

Palacio Liria. I swooped down to house level and began hitting them, one after the other.

This was not such a great task as it might seem, the one the Rorwicks and I had set ourselves. We had a whole city to search for one man, but we could eliminate an awful lot of it. Aleksandr Tkachevich was more or less on his own, there were policemen watching the hotel where he had been registered with his parapsychic protectors. The most he could do was find another hotel and hole up in it. And not a grand sort of hotel either. It would be a third rate one, or maybe even a pension. So I confined myself to those.

I moved around with the speed of thought. All I had to do was whisk in and out of a hotel room and give one fast look around. While it was true that I had a bit of fun now and then—you'd be surprised at some of the things that go on behind the staid front of a hotel—but while playing the voyeur, I never forgot my primary target.

While I was in the middle of my hunt, it began to rain. It was strange, seeing those big watery drops fall and not feeling them. They went right through my astral body. But below me I watched the trees sway in the wind and their leaves flail the air as the raindrops pelted them. A few leaves fell and littered the sidewalks which were rapidly clearing of people as they fled for the shelter of doorways and restaurants.

I ignored the rain and went on hunting.

It took me six and a half hours before exhaustion set in.

Astral Alex seemed to have disappeared from the face of the earth. He could be walking around the streets of Madrid. I went low, flying along like a disembodied spirit, scanning bodies and clothes. I remembered what Alex had been wearing the last time I'd seen him, and I didn't believe he'd stop for a change of clothing.

He had been a very scared man.

All he would be thinking of was escape.

Escape! Airplanes? Or the train?

I cursed my stupidity. I should have thought of those at

once. If I had been Aleksandr Tkachevich, I would be on the fastest jet out of Madrid, bound for Moscow or some other place behind the Iron Curtain. I could make my report in absolute peace and quiet there.

I dropped to the ground and walked through the North Station and the trains waiting there to leave. There was no sign of him. I went to the airport and nosed around for about half an hour. I drew another blank.

I came back to my body.

The Rorwicks were gone, so I went to the bedroom and undressed. It was almost dinner time, and I was starved. I hadn't had the opportunity to feast on that steak and French fries I'd asked David to order for me. I called the desk, asking if there were any messages for me. I expected David to have left word, but the big lug had apparently forgotten all about me.

I took a shower, then sat down in front of my vanity to do my face. First came the liquid foundation that I rubbed into my skin; then, as is my custom, the eye-liner and the false eyelashes. I was having a bit of trouble with my right eyelash. It fell in front of my eye just as I reached for my powder brush-on. The brush-on went flying and a cloud of powder enveloped my world.

I said a few naughty words about life and my clumsiness, and I stared at the mess I'd made. The powder was all over everything, all my makeup stuff and the bottles and spray-on containers.

Oh, well. The hell with it.

I fastened the right eyelash and then used what was left of the brush-on to make my cheeks girlishly gorgeous. I sat back and eyed myself in approval.

The evening dress fitted me snugly, tight enough to show my curves, but not uncomfortably tight. I looked scrumptious in it.

I threw a mink stole over my bare shoulders—I was wearing one of my evening gowns—and went down in the elevator to the restaurant. I dined alone—except, that is,

for the couple of single *caballeros* who gave the eye and made gestures indicating that they could be had if I cared.

I did not care. So I bent above my prawns and *boullabaisse*, eating slowly because I was starving. It was a matter of practicing all my will power. My main dish was *cochinello asado*—roast suckling pig—and I devoured it. I made do without dessert and settled for a pot of good strong coffee. Later, I was glad I did. The coffee woke me up.

I sauntered through the hotel lobby, wondering if I ought to grab a magazine or paperback to take to bed. God knows where David was. I figured if I couldn't have him, I'd read myself to sleep.

I bought a paperback.

The elevator was crowded, I was full of food, and my eyelids were closing sleepily. The strong coffee was working overtime, keeping me awake, however. As I walked down the thick hall rug toward our room, my sleepiness fell away from me and I felt the way you do after a nice, long sleep. Wide awake.

Maybe it was that state of wide-awakeness that made me notice the tiny leaf on the edge of the rug just before the door. I was sliding my key into the lock when my eyes saw it, just beyond the toe of my slipper. I stared down at it with alarm jangling a mental bell inside my head.

The Russians were like an Argus-headed monster, with eyes all over and tentacles that reached out everywhere to grip and kill. They had tried by their expert paranormal people to get at me through my mind; now they were out to kill me in more ordinary fashion. Somebody had been in our rooms; not a maid, for her shoe would be clean from having been so long inside the hotel. Whoever had gone into our rooms, or paused here outside the door, had come recently off the rain-slick streets of Madrid.

True, it might be David. But I have been a special agent too long not to pay heed to my inner voice, a blend of female intuition and psychic sense developed over the

years. I would know soon enough if it were David in the room.

I marched down to the lobby, headed to a public phone booth, and called our suite. The phone rang and rang. David would have answered it. The ringing would have awakened him if he had been asleep.

My feet took me back to our rooms. Gently I inserted the key in the lock and turned it, half expecting the lock to blow up in front of me. But if there were a bomb inside the rooms, the man who left it would not be interested in killing a maid, and the floor maid might very well open the door before I did, to place towels and such inside.

I pushed open the door gingerly. The suite was empty. I stepped in, making sure to walk on the solid wood of the floor, not on the rug. I closed the door and drew a deep breath.

A bomb would be placed to kill only me. The Russians knew damn well by this time that David Anderjanian was with me; they would not be so interested in killing him. I was to be their victim. Therefore, the bomb was set to kill me and not David.

My reasoning seemed sound enough.

The problem was to discover ahead of time what I would do—and what David would not do. Well, to begin with, I was a girl. David was a man. What would a girl do in these rooms that a man would not?

Just in case an enemy agent was inside, maybe in the bath or the bedroom waiting to shoot me down, I drew my Belgian Bulldog out of my pocketbook. I tiptoed along the floor to the bedroom door. I kicked it open and ducked.

Nobody was inside the bedroom. The beds looked a little funny without their mattresses, which were still on the living room floor, where the Rorwicks and I had lain before we went astral hunting for Aleksandr Tkachevich. Gingerly I stepped onto bare wood and walked around the rug. I clambered over a dresser to avoid stepping on the rug, under which might be a bomb.

I pushed open the bathroom door, ready for a shoot-out. The bathroom was empty. I sagged against the door jamb and thought. What the hell would I do that David would not inside this suite? Of course, I might be giving the Russians too much credit—which is why I stayed off the rug—they might be willing to settle for just one of us. But I didn't think so. The Russians were pretty smart.

The drawer where I kept my girl-girl things, undies and lingerie and nighties? Could be. Maybe the drawer was wired so that when I pulled it out to get my scanties, the damn thing would blow up in my face. Well, I knew a way to find out.

I removed the roping from the venetian blinds. I tied one end to the drawer knobs and then got down behind one of the beds. Very carefully, very cautiously, I yanked on the ropes. The drawer came open without fuss. No bomb there. So I tried the other drawer the same way with the same result. I felt like a fool as I stared down at both open drawers that were filled with my feminine trifles.

I guess I'd been wrong about the enemy agents.

There was no bomb in here. Their paranormal people had been their only agents on this case. With a sigh of relief, I bent and lifted off my dress. I carried it to the clothes closet, hung it up. I slithered out of my bra and panties, garterbelt and stockings. I padded naked to the dresser and reached for a nightie.

I dropped the transparent blue nylon over my head and shook it down around my hips. I looked at my reflection and sighed. Too bad David wasn't here to see how gorgeous I was. Oh, well. It was his loss.

My hand went to the spray-on liquid with which I did my hair before I went to sleep at night. I apply that spray so my hair looks reasonably presentable in the morning. Now I could only stare at it in horror.

My hand froze in mid-air and a cold chill ran down my pretty spine. The bottle was spanking clean!

Nobody had to remind me how, when I'd been dressing

for dinner, I'd spilled my face powder and gotten it all over my perfume bottles, makeup kit, various spray containers, and the top of the vanity. I had been too hungry to clean up the mess. It had lain over everything.

That powder was still covering everything—except the spray-on container. I knew that no one would come in here and clean that one container. The maid would have dusted everything. David would have noticed nothing, and would have ignored the whole mess.

I took two backward steps and studied the spray container. There was no doubt about it. The thing looked brand new. Either it was not the same container I'd carried from home, or somebody had picked it up and wiped it clean. My money was on the first.

The telephone was in my hands and I was calling the police station. The door opened and David Anderjanian walked in. I clapped a hand over the phone and told him my suspicions. He took the phone and asked the bomb squad to come over and examine the can.

I had been right, I learned the next morning.

The container had been specially made and trapped with a powerful bomb that would have taken off the top of my head if I'd depressed the spray plunger.

I sat on the edge of the bed and listened to the chief of the bomb squad explain all this while David looked properly scared.

"We've got to get out of here," he told me after the policeman had gone. "We're sitting ducks for the Russians and we have no way of striking back."

"What about the Rorwicks?"

"Nobody associates them with us, as far as spying is concerned. Otherwise, they'd have struck at them long ago. No, you're their target, and I'm going to fix it so you don't get hurt."

Actually, the Madrid police fixed it, in a sense.

Just as we were going out for breakfast, there was a call for David. One of the detectives who'd been scouring the city with pictures of Aleksandr Tkachevich had struck

pay dirt. A clerk at the North Station had identified Astral Alex as the purchaser of a ticket to Vienna, via Paris. The train was a Trans-Alpine Express that traveled over the same route as the old Simplon-Orient, before it had been discontinued. Tkachevich would board the train at Paris and be on his way within the hour. He had taken the *Sud* to the city on the Seine.

David was his old cheerful self as soon as he'd hung up. "You've got to overtake it, honey," he gloated, rubbing his hands together, "and finish off that bastard before he gets to Vienna. I'll go make arrangements for a helicopter to get you to the plane."

"Great," I said dully. I was in no mood for any more fireworks. I was at the end of my resources.

David grinned and patted my shoulder. "Be of good cheer, darling. The case is almost closed."

I donned a black turtleneck sweater, black slacks and windbreaker. I shoved my Belgian Bulldog into a pocket. I crammed my slacks with money. I was to drop down out of a night sky on top of the train and get myself inside it, where I would hunt down Astral Alex. The money was to pay my fare, or use as a bribe if anybody objected on the train before I got my job done.

I ordered a big breakfast sent up from the dining room, not knowing when or if I would be eating again. I perched on the edge of a chair, feeling very sorry for myself. I chewed ham and scrambled eggs and sipped coffee until David came back. He had made all the arrangements, the efficient bastard.

"We leave in three hours," he told me. "The chopper pilot promises to deliver you over the train just after it emerges from the Simplon Pass tunnel, in Switzerland. He says it will be dark then, with no moon and many clouds at that spot. The people on the train will hear the whirly-bird motor, but nobody will notice you when you drop down onto it."

"I hope," I said darkly.

He reached out, yanked me over the little breakfast

table and gave me a big hug and kiss. David Anderjanian can be very persuasive when he feels the urge to be. He kissed all over my face and paused a long time at my lips.

"Keep safe for me," he whispered. "I won't live until you're back here to make me want to."

What girl could resist something like that?

I drooled over him for a while, I even offered to share a combined going-away present on the bed, but David was being noble. He didn't want to upset my emotional balance by making love to me, he would deny himself the pleasure of my company in order to insure the success of my mission.

Then he grabbed my elbow and escorted me to the door. We took a car to the airport where the helicopter was waiting. On the way, an idea came to me.

"Hey, what about Ilya and those others? They won't interfere with me again, will they?"

David chortled. "They are in comas, on board a plane to Washington. Our agents will meet and separate them. One will be taken to New York, another to San Francisco. One goes to Austin, Texas, the other to Duluth, Minnesota. That far apart, they'll never be able to combine their mental powers against you."

It was a relief.

The helicopter was a big black thing with plenty of power. Later I learned it belonged to the Paris branch of the League of Underground Spies and Terrorists, and had been flown to Madrid on special order from the General over a trans-Atlantic telephone cable. A man was standing beside the chopper, idly smoking a cigarette. He was a Frenchman.

He bowed and made eyes at me. David told him this was strictly business and not to get any ideas. I was to drop down on the Trans-Alpine Express at about nine o'clock tonight. If I didn't do it, the pilot would be held personally responsible.

I hoisted myself into the chopper and sank onto the seat beside the pilot. The Frenchman smiled and winked

at me so David would not see, then turned and assured my case officer that I would be on the train at the proper time.

I blew David a kiss. Then we were lifting up over Barajas Airport and Madrid. I waved to David until he was too small to see.

I turned my eyes toward the north and Switzerland.

Although there is no more Simplon-Orient Express—it was discontinued in 1962—the train that was my destination was a modern-day version of that older and more famous one. The Simplon-Orient made its first run in 1883, from Paris to Istanbul. It was almost eighty years old when it died from lack of passengers, plane travel being what it is these days.

The Simplon-Orient Express ran through Dijon, Lausanne, Milan, Venice and Trieste; then headed into what is now Iron Curtain country: Belgrade, Sofia, and Istanbul. The Trans-Alpine Express would follow in its tracks. In those earlier days Istanbul was known as Constantinople. The entire run took about sixty-eight hours.

From Paris to Lake Geneva would take about six hours.

I watched the sun go down with mingled feelings. In another few hours I was going to kill a man. I am used to this; it is part of my job as the lady from L.U.S.T., but usually I kill in the heat of battle. I rarely set out with cold-blooded murder in mind.

But Astral Alex was a danger the free world could not ignore. He had talents that nobody else on Earth had, and he worked for the Russians. It was justifiable homicide in my eyes, and in the eyes of the organization that paid my salary.

The sky darkened slowly to the east.

Our flight had taken us over the Pyrenees and the Gulf of Lyons, above Nimes and Mount Blanc. Now the Alps were beneath our propellers, capped with snow and bulking like recumbent giants on the earth. A touch of ice was

forming on the hull as the chopper rose upward to clear a mountaintop.

The pilot caught my hand, jerked it.

"*La bas*," he snapped, pointing. "Down there!"

I saw the train coming out of the tunnel.

Chapter Seven

The helicopter dropped at a steep angle, making my stomach feel as if it had parted company with me. My hand was fastened on the door handle. I was ready to make a fast exit as soon as the pilot gave me the word. He would not touch down on the train top. I had to do it on my own.

"*Allez*," the pilot rasped.

The train was crawling below us, chugging along and making enough noise to drown out the sound of the chopper's motor. The whirlybird was skimming above the train. I could see the golden lights on either side as they lit up a tiny part of the Swiss countryside.

As the door opened, the wind hit me in the face, pushing me back inside the whirlybird cabin. I fought to get out. The chopper was hovering a foot above the train. Picking up speed now, it would be even more dangerous to jump.

But it was now or not at all.

I held onto the door handle with a hand and leaped.

My body hung between the train and the helicopter for a long, long moment. Then my feet were hitting the roof of the car and I was tumbling heels over head to the edge and—

Not off! But almost.

My fingers scrabbled for a grip as I spread myself out as far as I could go in all directions. I tried to hold onto that car top with my belly, my breasts, my outspread arms and my girl-girl legs. I slid along, I felt my foot go over. The wind was adding its drag to the speed of the train by this time, so I flattened myself against the car top and made like a leech.

After a time, I realized I was no longer sliding. I got to my hands and knees and crawled. I came to the end of the car and slid down into the space between this car and the next. I clung to the car top with my hands and dropped. I landed safely, teetered a moment, and then grabbed a rail door handle to steady myself.

I opened a door and stepped into a narrow passageway.

These cars are on the posh side, with carpets on the floor and flowerpots on the wall, here and there. I moved along the corridor, wondering how I was going to find the compartment with Astral Alex.

I opened a door and called, "Alex, darling?"

A woman's voice snapped, "You're in the wrong compartment!"

I tried three more doors, without any luck.

I was in the process of opening the fifth when a conductor came around the corner at the far end. I slid the door wider and stepped in. The room was dark except for a rectangle of golden light on the carpeting from an open bathroom door. I stood there in the blackness, scarcely daring to breathe.

The conductor walked past. I was opening the door to go out when a young man came from the bathroom with a towel wrapped about his loins. He was young, maybe eighteen. Except for the towel, he was naked.

"I say," he said, catching sight of me.

I sighed and closed the door, smiling at him. If he made a scene, I was going to have to hop him. "I'm awfully sorry," I told him. "I must have lost my way."

He frowned suspiciously. "I don't remember you at all, you know. And I make it a habit to study my fellow passengers. I'm going into the diplomatic service—after I have my vacation. I know just about everybody but you on board."

"That's marvelous," I told him, moving toward him slowly. "I think you're a very ambitious young man."

He smiled back at me. "Man has to use his eyes, in the diplomatic service. I use mine." His eyes were running up and down my tight black slacks and sweater. His eyes paused at my thrusting breasts and savored them. "Why don't you tell me who you're looking for? Maybe I can help you."

"I'm with Alex Tkachevich," I informed him.

I was near enough to reach out and hand him a karate chop, if I had to. Since this was rather drastic, I ran my sharp red fingernails up and down his naked, almost hairless chest instead. He shivered. I kept staring up into his eyes and found them slightly glazed.

"I'm his wife," I added. "But he ignores me."

"I f-find that h-hard to believe."

My fingernails ran around his belly, just above the towel as I stared deep into his eyes. "I'm a neglected wife," I hinted.

His smile was hesitant, somewhat fearful. "This Alex chap must be rather an idiot, eh? Ignore a girl like you? Wha—what's the matter with him?"

I figured I had a better way to shut him up than belting him with a karate blow. If I could make him believe that he'd made love to a neglected wife, he would develop guilt feelings, being so young, and would be more inclined to button his lip about me than if I hauled off and socked him.

"You wouldn't ignore me, would you?" I whispered, pressing closer.

His towel was jutting out in front of him, I discovered when I crowded him. My thighs nudged his arousal. He drew a hissing breath and tried to draw back. I wondered

if he might be a virgin. I put a sweated arm about his naked waist.

I answered my own question, smiling lazily. "No, I can feel you wouldn't. You seem very large for such a young man. Is that really all you?"

In the golden light from the bathroom, he blushed beet red. He tried to draw away, but my arm held him. I loosened the knotting on the towel. I took a fold of the towel between my fingers and held onto the fluffy stuff as he stepped backwards. The towel came loose and fell from his loins. He sprang up as if set on springs and poked himself at me.

I starred down at him. I hadn't been lying. He was large, indeed, for such a youth. He smiled weakly and made a grab for the towel. I put it behind my back.

"No, just let me look at you," I breathed.

If I had to play the part of a neglected wife to find Astral Alex, I would. These are some of the sacrifices a secret agent must make when the occasion arises. In all honesty, I enjoy the sticky situations into which I get myself, like now. Aleksandr Tkachevich wasn't going anywhere, he would be on the train for the next few hours. In the meantime, I had to learn where he was.

"If you tell me where my husband is, I'll go," I giggled, still looking down at his nakedness. He made no effort to cover himself; at first, I think he was in something like shock, then he began to like the idea of getting looked at by a woman.

"I'll tell you if—" he began.

My hand itched. I slid it forward, caught hold of him and squeezed. He moaned and his eyes closed as his hips shuddered.

"If—what?" I breathed.

"If you'll be good to me!" he blurted.

"You've been reading stories about those trains and beautiful women, haven't you? International lady spies and other romantic notions?"

He nodded, grinning shamefacedly. His entire body

was quivering because my fingers were grasping and loos-
ing, and he was reacting to the caress as any male will do.
His face was red, then white, and the breath hissed in his
throat.

"Has the conductor been through here, looking at tick-
ets?" I wondered out loud. I didn't want to be asked to
show a ticket I didn't have, but I said, "I wouldn't want
him to interrupt us."

His eyes opened and beamed at me. "Oh yes. He went
through some time ago. B-but what about your hu-hus-
band?"

"He was sleeping when I left for the little girls' room.
When he sleeps, he sleeps very soundly. Now if you'll be
a real good boy and keep quiet, I think we can do some-
thing about this problem of yours."

He threw his arms around me and hugged me, kissing
my face rather clumsily and without finesse. I endured it,
liked him for his innocence. I slid my left arm up and
around his neck and drew his lips to my slightly open
mouth. He caught on real good. In a moment his own
mouth was open and his tongue was tickling mine.

He was also panting like a bellows.

I whispered against his lips, "But not so loud, not so
loud. There. Breathe through your mouth."

"I c-can't, not when I'm kissing you."

"Then let me do the kissing."

I kissed him all around his face and neck and upper
chest. I nibbled at his nipples. I ran my fingernails up and
down and back—both hands, because by this time I'd
taken my hand from its perch on his manhood—until he
was making noises like a wheezy bellows.

"Sh-shouldn't I be do-doing something?" he choked.

"You lie down on the bunk, dear."

Part of him lay down, the other part was standing at
attention. I admired him, then lifted the sweater up and
over my head. Sure, I was goofing off. I should have been
in Aleksandr Tkachevich's cabin, killing him, but pleasure

before business, any day. Besides, I had to find out where Alex was hiding himself.

The young man stared at my naked torso, at the filmy black brassiere that did very little to hide my generous breasts. To let him see even more, I turned on a small light. I leaned over him and brushed my breasts back and forth across his face. His hands lifted to grab them but I slapped them aside.

"Let me," I whispered. "My husband is always so rough. I want to do this my way."

He nodded, biting his lower lip, watching as I slid a hand inside a bra cup and lifted out a white globe tipped with a swollen brown nipple. I thought my young Casanova would faint. He got red and choked as his eyes bulged.

"First one you ever saw?" I teased.

He nodded, never taking his eyes away.

"You're going to tell me where my husband's cabin is, aren't you?"

"Next car, first cabin to the left," he panted.

He didn't even make it hard, though he did increase my respect for these young students of the diplomatic corps. I smothered a smile and touched his lower lip with a forefinger tip, lowering it. I pushed my nipple between his teeth. He closed down on it like a hungry infant.

Still bent over, I lowered my slacks. The young man was trying to see me as I dragged down my panties but he was blinded by the top part of me and could only thump his hips up and down and strain helplessly at the empty air.

I said softly, "You won't tell my husband where I've been, will you?"

He shook his head, not wanting to let go of my breast with his mouth. I put a bare leg over his loins and knelt above him. I was making an ally with my teasings, but I didn't want to delay too long.

I reached for him, took him and mounted. He became the horse and I the rider.

I pumped my hips slowly, not wanting to exhaust him. I sat upright at first, kneeling on either side of his slim hips. Then as I discovered that he was not going to make this a fast one, I relaxed a little, telling him to draw up his legs so I could lean against them while I rested my feet under his armpits. He went at this for a while, then I lay forward on him while he placed his legs flat on the bed.

My breasts scratched his almost hairless chest, my nipples large and tumescent. He was moving his head from side to side, whispering meaningless things, as though he dreamed. He was lifting slightly at his hips, helping me while feeding pleasure to himself at the same time.

I let my *constrictor cunnae* muscles clasp and unclasp, as in the manner of the *casse-noisette* of the French. He wailed softly to that bit of pussycat play and clutched at my hips as if to lift me bodily off his flagpole. I clung to him while telling myself it was now time to go hunting for Astral Alex. The train would be asleep by this time, only the conductor and the train personnel would be awake, or should be awake. All I would have to do is slide into Astral Alex's compartment, put my gun against his forehead and pull the trigger.

I pumped faster. I whispered love words to the man beneath me. My hips went up and down and around. My companion arched off the bunk, his mouth opening to let out a wail of stark delight.

I clapped my palm over his lips.

My feminine muscles gripped him hard.

The Englishman gave me all he had, frozen in that arched position, quivering and shaking all over. It was a sublime moment for him; his lips and tongue worked against my palm that had clamped down over his mouth, fortunately; otherwise the whole train would have been wide awake.

I studied the forded muscles of his throat as they worked and knotted to the fierceness of his release. My own interior muscles aided that outpouring of tribute to

the love gods. I milked him like crazy, in order to exhaust him.

He sank back on the bunk, moaning softly. My naked body rested on his body. I soothed him by brushing back his yellow hair.

"Sleep, darling. Sleep, and get back your strength."

I waited five minutes. His chest rose and fell rhythmically. He was in the land of Nod, with my body on top like a blanket to give him added warmth. Slowly I crawled off him. I reached for the real blankets and spread them over his body. I tucked him in and patted his cheek.

Then I got dressed.

Carrying my handbag with my right hand around the pearl butt of the Belgian Bulldog, I eased open the cabin door. The corridor was empty. I tiptoed out, closed the door behind me, then ran along the corridor and into the next car.

First cabin to the left, he had said.

I turned the knob and went in. The room was dark, completely unlighted. And the window shades had been pulled down. But in that brief moment when I opened the door and took a fast look inside the compartment, I noticed the sleeping man on the bed, his back turned toward me.

I moved forward on silent feet, gun extended.

I was just about to poke the gun muzzle against the head of the man on the bed when two arms clamped about my upper body, pinning my arms to my sides. Two more arms grabbed my legs.

For an instant, I froze in disbelief.

It was then that the man on the bed leaped off it in a swirl of bedcovers and grabbed my gun, twisting it savagely out of my fingers. He stood up and just as I saw his face, recognizing him as Astral Alex, he clobbered me across the cheek with the back of his hand.

I saw stars and sagged.

"No more," growled a voice in Russian. "We don't want to raise a commotion in here."

Too late, I opened my mouth to scream. The man who had hold of my arms and upper body shifted an arm to slap a hand over my mouth. I bit down on his fleshy palm with as many teeth as I could bring into play. His body stiffened. He choked back a scream of pain.

At the same time I brought up a knee—since the man kneeling at my feet had slightly relaxed his grip—into the manhood of Astral Alex. He screeched like a woman.

I bent forward, carrying the man behind me up onto my back, and toppled sideways onto the character who was kneeling beside my legs. We went down in a heap. This time I opened my lips and let out a wail that would have done credit to a raped woman.

Then I turned and grabbed for the nearest male. I was set to apply judo and karate, or any other form of fighting technique to get out of that room. But the Russians had picked well when they chose these two bully-boys to protect Aleksandr Tkachevich. A fist came out of the blackness and rammed into my jaw, driving my head into something hard which I later learned was the head of my quarry. We both went down in a heap of flesh.

The pair of bully-boys came after me. One of them lifted me up, sagging and limp. The other rammed a fist into my solar plexus. The air went out of my lungs. I couldn't have moved if the train had been on fire. I just flopped and lay there trying to get my breath back.

"What are we going to do with her?" a voice asked.

"Take her to Moscow, of course! What else?"

"I think we should kill her."

"What? And lose the opportunity of learning how she was able to find Alex in the first place? And how she caught up with him in Madrid? No wonder you are not very far advanced in the organization, Fedor."

"What of Alex? . . . Alex? Where are you?"

Alex groaned beside me. A hand came down to lift him

to his feet. At that moment, somebody knocked on the door.

"Is anything wrong?" asked the conductor.

If I had been able to speak, I would have told him what was wrong, in no uncertain terms. I would have claimed that these men were about to rape and beat me. But I couldn't speak a word. My mouth opened, but there was no air in my lungs.

One of the men stepped to the door and smiled. "My brother's wife has had a nightmare. She is sleeping soundly once again."

The conductor grunted and turned away. I lay there helplessly and listened to his footsteps receding along the car corridor. I could have wept.

A hand yanked me to my feet.

"Bind her," said a voice. "And be sure to gag her as well, Fedor. We do not want to lose this one. She is very valuable."

My arms were forced behind my back just as Alex shoved a handkerchief between my teeth. A rope was twisted about my wrists and drawn so tightly the circulation of my blood practically came to a dead stop. Tape was shoved onto my jaw and cheeks to hold the handkerchief in place. Then I was lifted and dropped onto the bunk. Somebody took another piece of rope and tied my ankles together. Then they dragged the coverlets up over me and forgot my existence. They also took away my money and my gun.

The train jerked and shook as it trundled over the rails.

We were long gone out of the Simplon Pass tunnel, and heading for the glass-covered railroad station of Milan. I figured I might have a chance at Milan of attracting attention. I could kick my legs, couldn't I? And maybe bang my head against the bunk wall? It was about all I could do, but I figured it would be enough.

So I waited while we sped through the Alps and downward onto the western sector of the Lombardy Plain. We rolled into Milan in a fog and a drenching rain. I was

gathering my strength to make an uproar when a Russian came over to me, and turned me on my face.

He grinned, "You be good girl, yes? You make no noise."

I was nodding but he only chuckled.

"I make sure you be quiet."

He undid my slacks belt and my slacks and pulled them and my panties down to bare my soft buttocks. He patted them gently and then stuck a needle into the left one. I conked out an instant later.

I was quiet, all right—all the way to Venice.

When we were moving out of that station, a hand shook me to wakefulness. "You eat now," said a voice, and I smelt potato soup.

European travelers often cook their own meals inside their train compartments. This is not an uncommon practice, it is done all the time. My captors did not care for Italian food. They had borscht and potato soup, which they heated over a small kerosene stove.

Fedor fed me the potato soup, smiling down at me.

"Is good," he encouraged. "You eat, keep strong."

I ate because I was damn near starving to death. I finished three bowls of the stuff without drawing a deep breath. Fedor was as pleased as a child. He beamed at me, nodding his head and patting my shoulder.

"Russian food good. You see?"

When I was done, he gagged me again, but by this time I was getting the germ of an idea. I knew damn well I could never escape these men under my own power. My wrists and ankles had been tied so tightly I could not have moved even if they'd freed me.

I needed outside help.

I'd spent a lot of time thinking, when I hadn't been sleeping on this trip. There was only one way I was going to alert anybody that I'd been made a prisoner. And that was by astral projection.

Always, when I'd tried etheric traveling, Martin and Marion Rorwick had been on hand to yank my etheric

body out of my physical one. This time I was going to have to do that by myself. I sank back on the bunk bed and lay on my spine. I wriggled and twisted myself into as comfortable a position as I could get. Then I closed my eyes.

I reviewed all the necessary steps to take before my astral body would be free of its flesh and blood envelope. There was the pulling back of my spirit-body from the physical one, that could be accomplished once I was in the astral trance. The trance itself was like that state between sleeping and waking, so I drifted off to sleep, closing my eyelids and letting the rocking of the train soothe me, as a cradle does a baby.

I drifted aimlessly in a grey world, where there was neither waking nor sleeping, but an in between state of consciousness. I was aware of myself, but not of the three-dimensional world around me. It was in this awakening moment that I must make the attempt.

My astral feet drew back, as did my astral hands.

I drew myself out of my legs and arms. I made myself coil up in a little ball inside my head. My lips were partially open; I hoped through this to make my etheric escape. I hoped there would be no distraction. The Rorwicks had warned me that a loud noise or a shock of some kind would destroy my trance-like state.

I had never before succeeded in leaving my physical body without the help of the Rorwicks. I did not know whether I would be able to do it now. But I was trying.

My God! How I was trying! I fought against the clasp of flesh, of blood, of lungs and entrails.

Then, I was standing on the bunk, all golden and unclothed. I stared around me, not quite believing the evidence of my etheric senses. The three Russians were sitting in the compartment, dozing. As far as they knew, I was in a sound sleep.

I rose upward from the train.

I shot westward as fast as thought could take me. At any moment one of my captors might rouse me to wake-

fulness, forcing my astral body to return to my physical body. Before that happened I had to contact the Rorwicks. I had to! Otherwise—I would not let myself think about that.

Over Italy and France I raced, like the disembodied spirit I was. I zeroed in on Madrid, where the Rorwicks were staying. This was home country to me, having spent so much time flying around over the city.

I looped above La Castellana and dropped toward the Castellana Hilton. I knew where the Rorwicks were staying and I went directly to their room, which was not far from the suite David and I had shared.

I swept in through the window. The Rorwicks were asleep, in twin beds. I made directly for Marion. Her bare shoulders were outside the covers, bisected by narrow blue nightgown straps.

"Marion! Marion!" I called.

Of course, she could not hear me. No living person can hear the voice of an astral projectionist. I touched her, ran fingertips across her face, but my fingers went through her skin, not over it. I could have wept from frustration. I'd been lucky enough to eject my astral body; now I was doomed to failure in trying to rouse the Rorwicks.

I had to think. Somehow I must find a way to wake her.

My eyes studied her smooth bare shoulders and the blue straps of her nightie. I sighed. Marion Rorwick was a sensualist. Maybe, by appealing to her senses, I could rouse her out of deep sleep. I knelt beside the bed.

My lips kissed her upper arm. I ran my mouth along her shoulder to her neck, taking care that my lips would not go through her skin but just graze over it. I kissed her soft warm throat that was faintly moist from the warmth of her body. She sighed and her lips smiled.

She was having a nice dream, I gathered, because she made cooing sounds, the sort a woman will make when she is being loved gently and tenderly. I slid my head to the edge of the blanket. I could not nudge it out of the

way, as I might do were I in my flesh and blood body, but I could go through the blanket to the nylon bodice that contained her heavy white breasts.

I saw the bulge of her breast, the dark circle of an erected nipple. My mouth browsed on her breast. So great was my imagination that it seemed I could feel its smoothness against my open lips. I kissed and caressed her large breast until it quivered and she moaned.

"Yes," she breathed, still dreaming. "Oh, yes!"

Her hand came up, pushed down the blanket and then the nightgown strap. Her hand slipped into her bodice and brought out her breast. Her eyes were still closed but there was a dreaming smile on her full mouth.

I kissed her breast, and the rigid nipple.

Marion sighed deeply, crooning.

"Wake up, Marion. Wake up! I need you!"

I remembered something Martin Rorwick had told me, back in New York. Something about the false awakening, when the spirit was poised between the astral plane and the physical one. Marion was asleep, but it might not take too much to wake her etheric body.

I went on stroking her breast with my mouth, but now I added the feathery touch of my fingertips, down her side and across her nyloned belly to the juncture of her thighs. My fingertips sought and probed, but so gently that they did not penetrate the flesh that contained her spirit.

She stirred and her mouth came open.

I whispered that I needed her, that I was in danger, that she was the only one who could help me. I don't know. Maybe my words went into her subconscious or even to her astral body, that lay quiescent and asleep inside its flesh and blood envelope.

Her eyes opened. She stared at the ceiling.

"Martin?" she breathed.

"Not Martin! Eve!"

My hair stood up. I could see her etheric body through the pale mist of her skin. She lay golden and lovely inside

that other body of hers. And slowly, her golden head turned and she stared at me.

"Eve!" she cried.

She sat up. At least, her astral body sat up. The rest of her was still sprawled out asleep. Her hand came out and caught mine. Her eyes were stormy with fear and worry.

"What is it?"

"I'm a prisoner on that train! They were waiting for me. You must contact David—tell him. He may be able to think of a way to rescue me. You must hurry, Marion. I'm being taken behind the Iron Curtain. Once they get me far enough, nobody is going to be able to rescue me!"

"Oh, yes. I will. Wait!"

She sank back inside her body. Then her physical body stirred and sat up, throwing back the covers. Her legs swung over the side of the bed. She looked at where her spirit body remembered me to be, but I could tell that she did not see my own golden body kneeling here.

She padded on bare feet toward the chair over which her robe had been tossed. She slid her arms into the sleeves, then tiptoed toward the door. Her head turned, she cast a glance back at her husband. He was sleeping soundly.

Marion opened the door and padded down the corridor.

She paused outside our suite and scratched lightly. Womanlike, she paused to pat her fallen hair and loosen the collar of her nightrobe so that David, when he opened the door, would be sure to see the line of her throat and the beginning swells of her breasts.

Oddly enough, I was not jealous. I was too worried about getting my body out of the bunk onto which the Russians had shoved it.

The door opened. A bleary-eyed David stood there in his pajamas. He took one look at Marion and woke up fast. His big hands reached out and grabbed hold of her hand, yanking her into the room with him. I don't know whether Marion intended it to happen that way, but when

she was jerked forward, her robe came open and her nightgowned body came up flat against my case officer.

"Where's your husband?" he breathed.

"Sound asleep," she whispered.

"You're taking a big chance, coming here."

His hand closed the door. I danced around, yelling for her to tell him about me. I scowled and cursed David in three different languages. They did not hear me, naturally. Why were they standing jammed so tightly together, staring into each other's eyes like that? Why didn't Marion tell him about me?

I knew, of course.

They had a case of the hots.

Marion wanted David. David wanted Marion. His body was feeling her big breasts and somewhat plump thighs jammed up against it. And she was feeling his male reaction to that contact. Having experienced his reactions to my own nearness, I knew damn well what she was feeling.

Marion murmured, "David, it's about Eve."

Well, at last they were getting down to business.

My darling did the right thing. He got alarmed and shoved her back away from him. "What about Eve? What's the matter? How come you're worried about her? I haven't heard a thing—except that she landed safely on that train!"

She walked across the room and sat on the edge of the bed. She crossed her handsome legs, bare beneath the thin blue nylon. I wished she would close the front of her robe, because that nylon was a blue fog that hid very little of her very feminine contours. I could see the dark smudge of her pubic growth, and I am quite sure David saw it too.

Marion told him how I'd come visiting her in my astral form.

"I didn't think she could do that. Awake a person, that is, who isn't in the astral form herself."

"I was in a false awakening coma," she explained.

I yelled to them to concentrate on getting me off that train. They never heard me.

David said, "Oh."

He sat down in a chair and leaned forward, his eyes taking in the woman in her nightie. I could have kicked him. If I ever got out of this alive, I sure as hell would make him pay for this. And where it hurts the most, too.

Marion told him how I'd come to her, and how I was being kept in a train compartment, being taken to Trieste. From there a special train would be made up to carry passengers—including me—north to Vienna. Once inside the Iron Curtain, there would be a pretty slim chance to get me free.

David leaped for the phone.

I did not hear his words. Somebody was shaking my real body awake, and when this happened, the silvery cord that connects my astral body to my flesh body would contract like an elastic band and snap me back into it. It was one of the hazards of etheric traveling.

I popped back into my body and opened my eyes. I was inside the train that was moving slowly across a sloping stretch of ground, shaking and rumbling as if in protest to the strain on its aging equipment.

A man was grinning down at me. "Turn over, lady spy. It is time for another injection."

"No," I tried to yell through the gag.

A big hand clamped down on my mouth. Another hand grabbed my leg and flipped me over on my tummy. Somebody yanked down my slacks and panties.

A needle jabbed my bare behind.

Chapter Eight

I do not know how long I lay there under the influence of that drug. My body was rocked back and forth by the train trundling up and through the Carnic Alps, I imagine, because I slept like a baby. The conductor came and went, being told that I was the sleepy wife of one of the Russians. They produced a ticket for me—they were very thorough, these boys—and so there was no reason to be suspicious.

When it came time to eat, they freed my hands so I could chow down by my own efforts. I'd been a good prisoner most of the way. They figured I'd resigned myself to my fate.

I ate greedily because I was half starved. Besides, I needed all my strength for what was to come. On the other side of the Alps lay Austria, and once in Austria, I was going to be on my own. David Anderjanian and the League of Underground Spies and Terrorists would not be able to help me.

I drew a deep breath when the train reached the border.

It was now or never. Unless rescue came here, it would not come at all. I lay in the bunk and listened, but all I could hear were the sounds of men and women leaving the train or boarding it.

At all these border crossings the train crews change. The Italians were taking leave of the locomotive and the cars and were being replaced by an Austrian crew. From

the border to Vienna was a run of about a hundred and fifty miles.

I listened to the chugging of the locomotive, all the while moving my wrists back and forth, trying to loosen the ropes. When they'd freed my hands so I could eat they had retied them somewhat carelessly. I'd managed to keep my wrists slightly apart so that the cording wouldn't be as tight as before.

My eyes were still closed, and I pretended to be asleep. My thoughts were chaotic. I was being abandoned, I knew. Somewhere along the rescue trail David Anderjanean had run into a snag. This meant there would be nobody to rescue me, so I had to do this on my own. Right now I was being taken to Vienna. From Vienna I would be transported to Moscow, probably by *Aeroflot*, or maybe in a Russian bomber. I lay there and continued working on the ropes.

Years ago I'd envisioned a career as Penelope Courage, girl safecracker. I'd studied the escape tricks of the great Houdini, picking them up as a sideline to my imaginary safecracking. I had no strip of razor-sharp steel with me, but my wrists were thin, and by doubling over my hands I learned I could yank them upward and out.

I got a hand free. I tore off the gag.

After that it was easy.

I lay there, a free woman, and tried to think.

If I made a break for it I would not be in much better shape, assuming I could get away. Austria guarded its borders with patrols of armed men with automatic assault rifles and dogs. I had as much chance as a snowball in hellfire.

I waited. I was rested, and the two Russians in the compartment were staggering with sleepiness. They had slept sitting up so that I would be in the bunk when the conductor came. Their reactions would be slow.

Time went by slowly. My best chance to get away was at night. I kept feigning sleep and the men settled down.

An hour after I heard the first snore I stirred.

The compartment was filled with moonlight, tinting objects silver. These men were nameless and I had no compunctions about killing them. But I had to do it silently. I didn't want to rouse the whole damn train.

I made my first target a gun.

The butt-end of a Nagant was peeping out of the pocket of one of the men. I closed my fingers around it and withdrew it very gently, adept as a pickpocket. My father, a locksmith, taught me all he knows; but I'd learned my pickpocket talents on my own.

I now held the revolver in my hand, wondering what I was going to do with it. I couldn't stick the barrel against the temple of each man and fire. The noise would wake the dead, let alone the other men, and the rest of the train.

There had to be a better way.

I perused the compartment and found a set of shish kebab skewers. I lifted one, tiptoeing toward the nearest and largest of my captors.

I put the sharp edge of the skewer to his eardrum and drew a deep breath. I did not like this any more than the man to whom I was going to do it, but it was my life or his. We L.U.S.T. agents have been trained to kill when there is an emergency; this was definitely an emergency.

My hand shoved the skewer forward.

My victim jerked and opened his mouth. My hand clamped to his lips. A muffled moan and two glaring eyes turned up toward me were the only indications that he was still alive. He slumped over and lay there.

I went to the other man and did the same thing to him. He reacted by rising out of his chair and turning toward me with his hands outstretched, but I shoved him back onto the seat and held him there until his convulsions quieted.

The room held two dead men.

Aleksandr Tkachevich was not in the compartment. As a matter of fact, I did not remember having seen Astral Alex since the stopover at Trieste. I wondered if he had

left the train. Well, this was no time to find out. After putting their revolvers and bullets in my pockets, I moved to the door and opened it. I poked my head out into the corridor. Nobody was there.

I slipped from the compartment into the corridor. I ran for the end of the car. The train was moving slowly, chugging along as it straining up a long grade. If I was ever to jump, this would be the time.

I fumbled at the door. I got it open.

The night was filled with moonlight. I saw a long stretch of grassy hillside; in the distance, a snow-capped mountain peak. I dragged air into my lungs. I told myself to leap. My legs would not obey.

I closed my eyes and forced my legs to make like springs. I shot out of the car door and flew through the air. To avoid broken bones one must relax, making oneself loose in a fall. Being drunk would have helped, but I was stone sober. I made my body as limp as I could and then hit the ground.

I rolled and rolled down the slope.

My spine thudded into a rock.

I lay there, almost broken in two. I watched the train lights recede in the distance. My eyes closed and I breathed one long sigh of relief. Then I turned my head, staring at my surroundings.

It was damn cold. The wind whipped around the mountains and penetrated to my bones. I had to find shelter. After that I could worry about getting back across the border into Yugoslavia.

I pushed myself off the big rock and felt myself all over. No bones broken. I could walk. And so I did, for about three miles, or until—

The light was golden yellow around the next bend. It was shining out of a little stone hut set in a field of grass. Like Heidi. A number of goats were sleeping on the grass. I could smell food odors as I walked toward the little house.

Having a cautious nature, I peeped in the window be-

fore I knocked at the door. A young man was sitting at a table, shoveling food into his face. There was a bowl of steaming soup in front of him, a wedge of cheese, a pitcher of milk, a glass.

So I rapped knuckles on the wooden door.

The young man yelled something in Austrian, which I can't understand. So I cried out in Italian, "Please. I've lost my way. Can I come in?"

His eyes got big when he opened the door. He said in halting Italian, "Who are you? What are you doing in these hills?"

I guess my slacks and black sweater had him a little fooled. He thought I was a smart-alecky city girl, as he confessed to me later on. Right now I wore a hungry look and asked if he had any more soup.

He filled a spare bowl and set a loaf of bread down on a plate with some cheese. He poured milk, asking questions all the time.

I lied to him. I told him I was a tourist who'd had a fight with her husband on the train to Vienna, and that my husband had pushed me off. He was properly horrified. I asked him if he knew any way I could get back to Italy without being captured by the authorities, since my husband had my passport.

He grinned when I asked that. "You are afraid of the authorities, hey?" he chuckled. "Well, I am afraid, too. Not that I am a criminal, you understand, it is just the way the authorities do business. I am quite content here with my goats. I do not make much money, but I eat good. I do know a way through the mountains, but it will take a long time—and I cannot spare any of my time to act as your guide. I must tend to my goats."

He shrugged and ate. My eyes roamed the house. I saw a small ladder leading to an upper story where I assumed the bedroom would be. The whole downstairs was one huge room, part kitchen and part living room. The place was neat, but worn.

I said cautiously, "Perhaps you could tell me where I

might hire a guide? I mean, if you can't go with me, maybe another man can."

"You have money?" he asked thoughtfully.

I thought about L.U.S.T. And all the money it receives from Uncle Sam for international emergencies. "I have plenty. I'll pay any fee you name, but I don't have it on me." His eyes went over my sweater and slacks. "I can get it for you in any Yugoslav town that has a telegraph office."

"Dravograd," he nodded. "It's just over the border."

"How far?"

"Twenty miles, about."

He sat back and reached for his pipe and tobacco pouch. I thought about his goats while I watched him. I asked, "How much are your goats worth?"

"Fifty thousand shillings."

This translates roughly into about two thousand American dollars. "I'll pay you a hundred thousand shillings for them. If I buy them you can leave them here to browse while you guide me to Dravograd. Fair enough?"

He would not be hurried, a thoughtful, quiet type, contemplative and slow. He would think about my offer, he told me. Meantime, he would wash up. He would let me have the upstairs bedroom. He would sleep on the floor down here in a bedroll.

We sat and talked for a couple of hours. His name was Hans Greipfig, and he was almost thirty years old. He wanted to get married, but no girl would consider living this high in the mountains. They all claimed it would be very boring, with only the goats and a husband to keep them company. I had to agree with them. Tending goats is not my bag either.

Still, I was lucky to have landed here. A few miles either way and I would have missed him completely. I was not yet home free, but at least I was not out there on a mountain slope, freezing to death.

I slept like a baby in Hans' big bed.

I woke in the morning to the smell of eggs, ham and bubbling coffee. I told myself an Austrian girl might do worse than marry young Hans. He was a solid citizen, and though his goats did not make him wealthy, he owned them outright and made enough to support a small family. I came downstairs with a big smile on my face.

"Have you thought it all out?" I asked.

He nodded, placing a plate of scrambled eggs and two slices of ham before me. There was milk and some Viennese coffee. "Eat," he muttered noncommittally.

I ate until I was stuffed. Hans Greipfig sat down opposite me and ate about twice as much. When he was done, he loaded up his morning pipe and pursed his lips.

"I have thought it all out, as you say," he began. "I have a doubt as to whether I can trust you. I may guide you to Dravograd and you may run away without paying me. This is a risk I could take.

"On the other hand, you may be willing and able to pay me the hundred thousand shillings you promise. This will make me a very well-to-do man in these mountains. I will be able to buy many more goats and even hire a man to care for them. This means I will have more time to go down to the village and court Elsa."

"Your girl friend?"

He nodded gravely, sending out a few smoke signals from his pipe. "Yes. I love Elsa Hochhauser very much. She will not marry me at the time." His broad shoulders shrugged. "She thinks it will be too lonely up here. With more goats, with a man to tend them, we will be able to spend more time in town.

"And so it is I have decided."

He got up and knocked the dottle from his pipe into his palm. He was wearing a white shirt and leather shorts called *lederhosen*, high woolen socks and thick walking shoes. He looked me over, shaking his head.

"Is not too good, you're going like that in those—those little things on your feet. But I do not have the shoes to loan you."

"I'll manage," I said bravely. "Besides, it's only twenty miles to Dravograd, you said last night."

"As the bird goes, yes. For us, it will be nearer one hundred." At my exclamation he said, "The mountains go up and down, *ja*? It is up and down, up and down, for one hundred miles of walking. And so I will carry a bed-roll for us both while you carry the bag of food."

When I hefted the food bag, I protested it had enough for an army. He shook his head gloomily and remarked it was not enough.

We went out into the morning sunlight and started walking.

Walking up and down mountains is the most boring way of traveling I know. It is also the most frustrating, as well as the most exhausting. It took us half a week to reach Dravograd. Good time for a girl like me, Hans Greipfig commented, considering that I was not mountain bred.

Oh, sure. The scenery was beautiful, but if you are slipping and sliding down a mountainside as I often was, the scenery goes by too fast for real enjoyment. If you are climbing up a mountainside, you are too tired to rotate your eyeballs to the nearest snow-tipped peak.

Still, we got there.

We came into the city at dusk on the fourth day, when the town lights were going on and men were closing their stores. Hans took me right to the telegraph office. I sent a wire to David Anderjanian.

In less than half an hour a man was bowing to me in the telegraph office, stating that there was a hotel suite reserved for me, and a room for my guide, at the nearby Royal Slovenia. There was money deposited to my name as well.

"There won't be five thousand dollars there yet," I told Hans as we walked along the darkening street, both of us shivering to the chill blasts coming off the Karawanken. "But whatever it is, I'll split it down the middle with you."

There was a thousand dollars. I gave five hundred to Hans Greipfig, who was overjoyed. Then his native caution asserted itself. "This is not a down payment, is it? This is not part of the five thousand dollars for my goats, is it?"

"No, it is not," I told him. "This is just for spending money—so let's go spend it."

We had dinner at the hotel which I charged to my account, and then Hans and I hunted up a store that was still open. I bought myself a Loden coat, a sheepskin-lined affair. It might not have been as smart as something I could have bought on Fifth Avenue, but it was warm enough to keep the chill winds off my behind.

We went back to the hotel giggling like kids.

I telephoned David Anderjanian. I got Marion Rorwick.

"Darling, he's flown to be with you!" she cried.

"What are you doing in his room?" I asked suspiciously, remembering the way she'd been dressed when she'd gone night calling on my case officer.

Marion laughed gaily. "We had all his calls transferred to our room, darling. Now don't worry about a thing. David will be there in a matter of hours."

Well, that was a relief. Especially when her husband grabbed the phone to say hello and to tell me I was doing a great job. I hung up wondering when my case officer would reach me.

He arrived the following morning, just as I was turning over to burrow into the warm blankets for another session of shut-eye. He barged in the door, having told everybody I was his wife, swept back the covers, and yanked me up and into his arms. I was too sleepy to put up a fight, I just dropped my arms about his neck and hung on.

Then I got suspicious. "Hey," I yelled, pushing him away. "How come the love and kisses treatment? I didn't get Astral Alex, you know—or hadn't you heard?"

"You killed those two bodyguards, didn't you?"

"Well, yes, but—"

"They were still in the compartment as the Trans-Alpine Express nosed into Vienna. You know what that means. The Austrian police clamped down on everybody in the train. They held them incommunicado for quite a while, I understand. They had to let them go, of course—but they made sure they won't leave Vienna for a few days."

I understood.

"And since Aleksandr Tkachevich was on the train, he's also being detained! Oh, David—that's marvelous." An idea clobbered me. "But won't the Russians protest? I mean, they want Alex in Moscow to make his report, don't they?"

"Sure they do, but if they make waves about an obscure little character called Aleksandr Tkachevich, they'll rouse suspicions. They're too secretive to let that happen.

"No, they've got Alex off in a hunting lodge outside the city on the Danube. They're treating him royally, I understand—good food, fine wine, pretty girls to make sure he won't get lonesome. Even some guards to prevent anybody from intruding on his happiness.

"Guards, you say?"

He stood back and eyed me from under raised eyebrows. "You aren't going to stop now? When you have Astral Alex as good as presented to you on a silver platter?"

"I happen to be in Dravograd. He's in Vienna, or just outside it."

"Ever hear of airplanes? We can fly you to Vienna in an hour, once we reach Zagreb, which is only about seventy miles away. I've arranged for a helicopter to take us there."

David thinks of everything.

He even sent down for breakfast so I could eat in my room to save time. He paid five thousand American dollars to happy Hans Greipfig. David thought he saw dollar signs in his bright eyes, but I knew better; he was seeing

Elsa Hochhauser coming toward him on their wedding night.

Inside the hour we were whirlybirding toward Zagreb.

I boarded a BEA plane with my luggage. David had flown it on to Zagreb so that I might appear the ordinary tourist. I was registered at a very swank Imperial Hotel. Over a century old, it is the foremost hotel in Austria.

My small suite was done in antique furnishing, including crystal chandelier, gilded chairs, lounges, and a bed in which five people could have slept with reasonable comfort. I whipped off my clothes and dived under a soothing shower.

I phoned a rent-a-car service, standing with a towel wrapped about my wet curves. Then I got dressed for business. I put on a black nylon leotard; over this I wore a mini-skirt, lovebeads, and a body ornament, a belt that circled my hips as if it were hugging them. I slipped my Belgian Bulldog into my handbag, along with other useful things, like a can of Mace.

I waited half an hour until nightfall.

Then I threw a cloak around my shoulders and marched downstairs to the lobby and out into the street. My rented Porsche was parked at the curb. Its attendant was waiting for me. He bowed and accepted the thirty shilling tip I handed him.

I slipped behind the wheel, ran my eyes over the instrument panel for a few seconds, and took off. I drove to the *Universitas Strasse* and headed for the Danube. David had briefed me on the location of the hunting lodge—it had belonged to a Hapsburg prince a long time ago—and how best to get to it.

It was a pleasant drive. Soft golden lights lit the narrow road along the peaceful sweep of the Danube. Visions of Johann Strauss danced in my head, and the wind in the treetops seemed to carry the tunes of his waltzes. The moon was almost full. Stars twinkled, and were reflected in the Danube.

My journey was too short. Within the hour I saw the

stone and wood hunting lodge, set close to a bluff that overlooked the river. Its narrow windows were golden with light. I braked the Porsche and pulled over onto the grass. It seemed like something out of a fairytale.

I sighed. Enough dreaming. Reality intruded and I yanked off my mini-dress, body ornament, and beads. This left me in black nylon body-stocking, a very effective disguise at night. I strapped around it a broad, black leather belt that held a holster and two compartments, as well as a hook or two.

I slid the Belgian Bulldog into the holster and attached the can of Mace to one of the belt-hooks. Then I began the long walk toward the building where Astral Alex was staying.

Naturally, I'd parked the car out of sight, far away. I had to make up for it by trekking to a hedge that grew like a fence around the place. I crouched beside a tree, worried about watch dogs.

If the Russians had a couple of wolf hounds here, I was done for. Their sharp noses would scent me out and—

My hands went to the lowest branch. I swung up and crawled along the trunk, a handhold here and a toehold there. Finally, I was a few feet over the hedge-top. I crawled along a thick branch until I was above the lawn. The lodge was five hundred feet away.

Dogs? I would know in a moment.

I jumped down onto the grass. I waited, holding my breath. No barking came to trouble my ears. I breathed again and started toward the building. I was part of the darkness in the body nylon. If anybody saw me, I would look like a shadow; a moving shadow.

I ran with the Mace in my hand. If anybody yelled I hoped to be on top of him before he might sound a second alarm. But nobody made any noise except me. I came at last to a stone arch and an oaken door.

When I got my wind back, I asked myself how in hell I was going to get inside the place. It was like a fortress. The door was bolted on the inside, and all my skills as a

locksmith and safecracker were not going to do me one bit of good. On either side of the doorway were leaded glass panes. The glass was too thick to see through. Even if I bent the lead and extracted a pane I still could not reach the bolt.

I had learned the location of the bolt by running a strip of celluloid down the tiny crack between the door and the jamb. It was far enough below the leaded panes to prevent my pulling back the bolt.

So I tiptoed around the lodge, hoping for some other way in. The lower half of the lodge was of stone, with narrow windows—barred, yet—through which a rifle might be poked to fire at intruders. There was a back door as well, but there was a metal grille between the outer wall and the door itself.

I returned to the entrance.

Very carefully I ran my celluloid strip up and down. There were two bolts, I discovered, as well as the lock-bolt itself. The sliding bolts were set above and below the regular lock.

I leaned my head against the door and sighed. It was quite an obstacle. There were no trees on which to climb to reach the second floor. I'd checked that as I'd made my tour of the lodge. Either I entered this way or not at all.

My hand fumbled at my belt where a knife hung. I pried apart the leading of a glass pane, forced out the glass with my fingernails. I broke a fingernail and said a few naughty words. I may be a secret agent, but I am first and foremost a girl, and I always like to be at my most attractive.

I took off my belt and doubled it up, removing my holster. I wedged the belt through the diamond-shaped opening. I paused to breathe. I took a quick look down the long, wood-paneled hall and saw nobody in sight, although I heard a man laughing and a girl giggling, and the sound of slow, dreamy music.

With my left hand I swung the belt. I swung it three times before its big buckle caught on something. My hand

tugged. To my delight, the bolt slid back with a faint click. One down, one to go. I swung the belt again.

After five minutes, I got the second bolt open.

Only the main lock remained. Out came a thin metal strip that I inserted into the key-slot. The lock was an old one, dating back to about the middle of the nineteenth century. Whoever owned the hunting lodge had no reason to install a newer one. This made it easy for me.

The door opened inward. I stepped inside and closed it. My belt was still in my hand. I fastened the holster and settled the revolver snugly. Then I replaced the belt about my middle, glancing around. I studied the rich, dark woodwork of the walls and ceiling, the golden chandelier, and the ornate massive stone fireplace, carved from a single block of stone.

There was a lot of furniture in this great hall that opened into the entrance lobby. Two chairs fronted a chess table on which were set up the various pieces. A smaller table to one side held three cups and a silver coffee-pot. Against the white walls, where a number of lighted oil paintings hung, were pushed other chairs and a couple of couches and long tables.

Apparently the great hall had been used to entertain visitors when the Hapsburg prince had been in residence. It was only a memorial to the golden age of kings and emperors; pretty to look at, but not as functional as any ordinary living room. The fire in the hearth died down, and the room was getting a bit chilly. I moved through it on tiptoe.

A girl was giggling above me. I lifted my head and stared at a small wooden railing that formed part of a gallery overlooking the great hall. Beneath it, a staircase of the same dark wood turned at right angles and rose upward. I headed for the staircase. Suddenly I heard—

“Alex, now stop!”

“But I like to do this.”

“And what about me?”

Three voices, two female and one male, all in Russian.

Like all L.U.S.T. agents, I know Russian fluently. I moved to the stairs and up the treads.

There were no guards about, that was easy to see. If there were any, they were amusing themselves out of sight and sound. I paused on the landing and fitted a silencer onto the gun muzzle. I didn't want to annoy anyone with unnecessary noise.

Now I was in the hallway, gun in hand.

I listened until I heard more giggles. Pinpointing the bedroom in which Astral Alex was fooling around with the females, I slipped up to the carved oak door and put a hand on the old-fashioned metal doorknob. The knob turned easily. I eased the door open slowly.

My eyes were looking at a blue and white enamel stove, a relic of vanished elegance in Austria and Germany. The room was huge, with a four-poster bed to the far left, hung with a brocade valance and a bedspread to match. Its posts were the size of cannons, and each had been carved by a master sculptor. There was a worn rug on the floor, and just beyond the enamel stove, a big mirror was set into a wooden frame.

Aleksandr Tkachevich was in front of the mirror with two girl guards: No wonder I hadn't seen anybody downstairs or on the grounds. Astral Alex had his protectors right in his bedroom.

Only he didn't have protection in mind.

The girls had unbuttoned their uniform jackets. Their breasts were jutting, and Alex was staring at those four mounds with eager eyes. He was shaking, too, all over his body. Even from the doorway I could hear him panting.

Then I heard heavy footsteps behind me.

I almost died. I turned my head, stared at the empty corridor. A man was coming along the intersecting corridor at the far end of the hallway. He had not yet turned the corner.

I had to take the chance. I darted into the room and closed the door gently behind me. I risked one glance at the mirror. Aleksandr Tkachevich was standing before the

taller girl, slowly undoing her buttons. He didn't take his eyes away from the beginning swells of her breasts as the flaps of the blouse opened. I was safe for a moment.

I stepped toward a closet with sliding doors. I slid one door back and hopped inside. I closed it to within an inch of its jamb. I could see the mirror still, and the shorter of the two girls.

She was holding her hands on her breasts, pushing them in and closing her fingers, squeezing her breast flesh. Her mouth was open, her eyes were slightly glazed. She was watching what Astral Alex was doing, so I looked too, glancing in the mirror.

The blouse was open all the way by this time. Alex and I were being treated to the sight of two ballooning breasts, plumply white and capped by two dark red nipples thrusting out. Alex bent his head, his greedy mouth sought its dark red target. I could hear him moan in pleasure even from inside the closet.

My hand lifted the Bulldog with the silencer attached. I will kill him while he's in heaven, I thought to myself. I raised my gun. There was enough space between the wardrobe door and its jamb to shoot straight and true.

The hallway door opened and the man whom I'd heard walking around in the hall came into the room. I could see his red face and fleshy bulk reflected in the looking glass. He was staring at the bared breasts of the girls, and they were eyeing him and smiling invitingly.

I dared not shoot with the male guard so close. I might kill Astral Alex, but one of the other three would drop me before I could get away. And I had no desire to die in the service of my country; not when there was another way out of my difficulty.

I drew back inside the closet.

The male guard asked, "How're things, Alex?"

My quarry lifted his red flushed face from the two breasts he had been kissing. Saliva dribbled down his loose lips. His face looked dangerously contorted.

"Get out of here, you idiot!" Tkachevich screamed.

"Now, now, Alex. Don't lose your head."

"Tell him, Irene!" he begged.

The big blonde nodded her head at the male guard. "He's right, Leonev. He is to be comforted in every way while he's here."

"But—"

The small dark girl stamped her foot. "Oh, get out. He had me feeling so good with his lips, then you had to burst in."

Leonev sounded hurt as he explained, "I only came in to make sure there was nobody in your rooms."

My heart almost stopped. My right hand got a good grip on the Bulldog. As soon as Leonev opened the sliding wardrobe he would get the first bullet in the belly. The next one would be for Astral Alex. After that, the girl guards and I could shoot it out.

But Alex interposed. "You stupid fool! Who do you expect to find in here? There is nobody but me, and Irene, and Katya here. Now get out, get out."

"All right, all right. I'll be outside guarding your door."

This was cheering news for me. I sighed silently and told myself I would have to kill him, too, before I could get out of the hunting lodge. I leaned against a wooden upright inside the closet and waited.

The hall door opened and closed. Leonev was out in the hall. I heard a faint creak and realized he'd leaned his back against the door, perhaps to listen in on what was happening with Irene and Katya. I did a little listening myself.

"You are very beautiful," Alex whispered.

"Do you really think so?"

"Oh, I do! Can't you tell?"

My God! What love dialogue. As exciting as last year's newspaper. I wished I could have handled his speeches for him. But my quarry was not too bad in the activity department. He had his hands full of Katya's big breasts, and he was using his mouth on their enlarged nipples like a starving infant.

The tall blonde, Irene, was getting into the act. She was disrobing slowly, lazily. I could see her reflection in the mirror. Her uniform jacket came off, then her blouse, and her big boobs swayed and jumped as she walked about. She watched what Astral Alex was doing to the small dark woman.

Get on with it! my mind yelled. I don't have all night!

Apparently Alex did. He was a real mammaeist, all right. He practically gobbled up those breasts he was feeding on. He was getting to Katya, too. She was saying a little, rubbing her thighs together, both hands holding onto his head.

Then Irene got into the act. She reached out her red-nailed fingers and started to undress Alex. He paid no attention to her until she had him stripped to his navel and was pulling down his pants. Then he gave a kind of shocked yell and sought to escape. But Irene was too quick for him. She knelt behind him and put her arms about his hips and grabbed his excitement in both hands and started waving it up and down.

"Stop! You excite me too much! Please, you must stop."

The dark woman was using her hands to raise her uniform skirt up above her stocking tops. I saw bare thighs and the garters of her girdle. She rammed her girdled hips forward just as the other girl aimed Alex at her. Her plump thighs opened and closed. She had hold of him.

My quarry moaned and shook.

My mouth felt dry. I wanted in on this act. I found myself remembering the Rorwicks and what fun they'd been. I would have loved to plunge across the room and sample all the goodies I was being shown, but I had to be contented with squeezing my thighs together and thinking about David Anderjanian.

As I played the voyeur—I just couldn't turn my eyes away from that mirror—an idea came to me. Maybe Alex would get so tired that the girls would leave him to refresh in solitary slumber. If that happened, me and my Bulldog would make his sleep become eternal.

Alex was clawing at the girdle Katya was wearing, trying to get it down off her hips. Behind him, Irene was biting his buttocks, one after the other, with gentle little nibbles, driving him out of his skull. He quivered and quaked, damn anxious to relieve his emotions.

"Please, on the bed. Come on. Please!"

He was practically blubbering. Irene was pulling him back out of reach of Katya who was yanking her skirt off and tossing it aside. She did a modified strip for him, with flesh showing in the girdle opening. Neither she nor Irene were raving beauties, but they were passable, their bodies meaty and exciting.

Irene got to her feet, caught Alex by a hand and drew him toward her twitching buttocks. Her voice said, "Come along, you gorgeous man. Give Katya a chance to take off her stockings. My, you're such a large man—where it counts."

"I am a dying man."

"I know a way to please you. A very special way that I am sure you will adore."

"Hurry, then. Hurry!"

She let go of his hand and walked toward the bed.

That was as far as I could see in the mirror. I had to content my eyeballs by staring at Katya who was bent over, offering her bare behind to my gaze, undoing her garters. She began rolling down the stockings as the girdle collapsed at her feet.

Alex yowled in happiness. I heard Irene moan.

I wanted to see what they were doing, what this special way to please a man might be. While I am an expert on sex, I am not above learning anything new when it is offered to me. Katya turned to one of the standing lamps and shut it off. She did the same to the other. The room was now lit by a very dim light coming from a bedtable lamp. There wasn't enough light to see what was happening on the bed.

The part of the room where I was standing was in darkness. I slid back the wardrobe door quietly and eased

myself out into the open. I moved forward until I could see the bed.

Irene lay on her front, her knees at the edge of the bed where Alex stood between them, sawing back and forth. I grimaced, knowing disappointment. I'd thought I was going to learn something; all she was showing me was the *oolud-poolud* of the Hindus or as the Arabs call it, 'the manner of the ram.' This posterior position was known as *coitus a tergo* to the Roman emperors.

Katya knelt down behind Alex and began biting his behind. Apparently somebody had tipped them off that this little detail excited Astral Alex very much. He began going ape all right, his hips worked and bumped and flailed until I began to wonder if he was in some kind of fit. Then his mouth opened and he roared out his pleasure in no mistakable terms.

A door lock clicked behind me.

I jumped sideways, crouching down behind a gilt and brocade couch. Leonev came and stood on the other side of the couch, licking his lips and staring at what was going on under the canopy of the four-poster. The two naked women were dragging Alex onto his back, teasing him with their hands and mouths in an effort to make him recover his former elan.

Leonev signaled Irene. She raised her head and looked at him, then touched a finger to her mouth and gestured at the moaning Alex. Katya also raised her head and shook it at the guardsman.

I gathered that Leonev was in the habit of having both girl guards any time he wanted the. Astral Alex was an intruder. Apparently they had all been told to give him whatever he wanted, which explained the ardor of the girls. But once that was done, their hearts belonged to Leonev.

The girls succeeded. Alex was once more a man, proudly upright and gloriously potent. Katya swung around on him, settled her hips across his loins and guided him to her body. She was in the *Venus reversa* pos-

ture, with her back to his face. While her hips began to rock, Irene got into position herself.

She swung a leg over my quarry and sank herself down on his face. I saw his hands come up to clasp her buttocks as her mouth opened and her head fell back.

These girls might have preferred Leonev, but I thought Astral Alex was giving a real good account of himself. Their bit of Arabic *kechef el astine* went on for long minutes. Leonev stood there glaring at the twisted bodies on the big bed, his fists clenched in anger and another part of him rigid with enjoyment. I think at this moment I could have killed them all without retaliation, but I don't believe in wanton murder. If Leonev and the girl guards left Alex alone to sleep off his fun, I was more than willing to let them go.

It took almost half an hour. My quarry was more man than I gave him credit for. At length Irene leaned forward and tapped dark Katya on a bare shoulder. She herself slid away from the man beneath her and put a pink foot on the worn carpeting beside the bed.

Leonev grumbled softly, "At last!"

"Sssssh!" said Katya, unseating herself.

Irene ran to him, was caught up in his big arms and held off the floor while he kissed her hungrily. Katya came at her heels, to be gathered inside his left arm. He began to rumble laughter, but Irene clapped a hand over his mouth.

"Do you want to wake him? Quiet!"

"You wore the little bastard out, he won't hear a thing until morning. Then you two can come back and wake him up and tell him how good he is at bedding down two girls at the same time. But between then and now—we go to do our own loving!"

He turned and carried his woman naked from the room.

I sighed and leaned my head against the gilt woodwork of the couch where I knelt. I would have liked to be in Leonev's arms myself, right about now. After what I'd

been looking at, my flesh was reacting in its pussycat manner.

There was no time for self-indulgence, however.

I tightened my fingers on my gun and quiet I got to my feet. I walked across the rug to the edge of the bed. Astral Alex lay there, white and exhausted.

As a matter of fact, he was motionless. I started to get suspicious. I put a hand on his bare chest and found that his flesh was cold. There didn't seem to be any heartbeat. I blinked and lost my head a little.

Irene and Katya had worn the man out. As a matter of fact, they'd killed him with kindness. I slipped out a mirror and held it to his lips. There was no indication of breath.

I sighed. Somebody up there had done my job for me.

Just the same, I had to be sure. I put the muzzle of my gun to his forehead. I pulled the trigger.

Then I whirled toward the door. The pop of the silenced shot had seemed loud enough in the bedroom, but would Leonev, Irene or Katya hear it? I waited for what seemed to be a long time.

I went out into the hall and down the stairs. There was no alarm, nobody came rushing out of whatever room the guards were using. Probably they were too busy grunting and groaning to be guarding. I got to the front door and closed it behind me gently.

My feet fled away into the night.

I stayed three days in Vienna to find out the reaction to the death of Aleksandr Tkachevich. The Russians were properly shocked, I learned from my underground connections. They blamed Leonev, Irene, and Katya for his death. They were being summoned back to Moscow for examination.

The murders in the Trans-Alpine Express remained an unsolved mystery. I phoned David about it, using guarded language while pretending to be his wife. I explained that I would stay here for another few days, to learn what else I could. David told me he would fly to join me.

And he did, the darling. We enjoyed ourselves very much. Vienna can be very romantic when your job is done, and all you have on your mind is pleasure.

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